The Silence of Dean Maitland

Maxwell Gray

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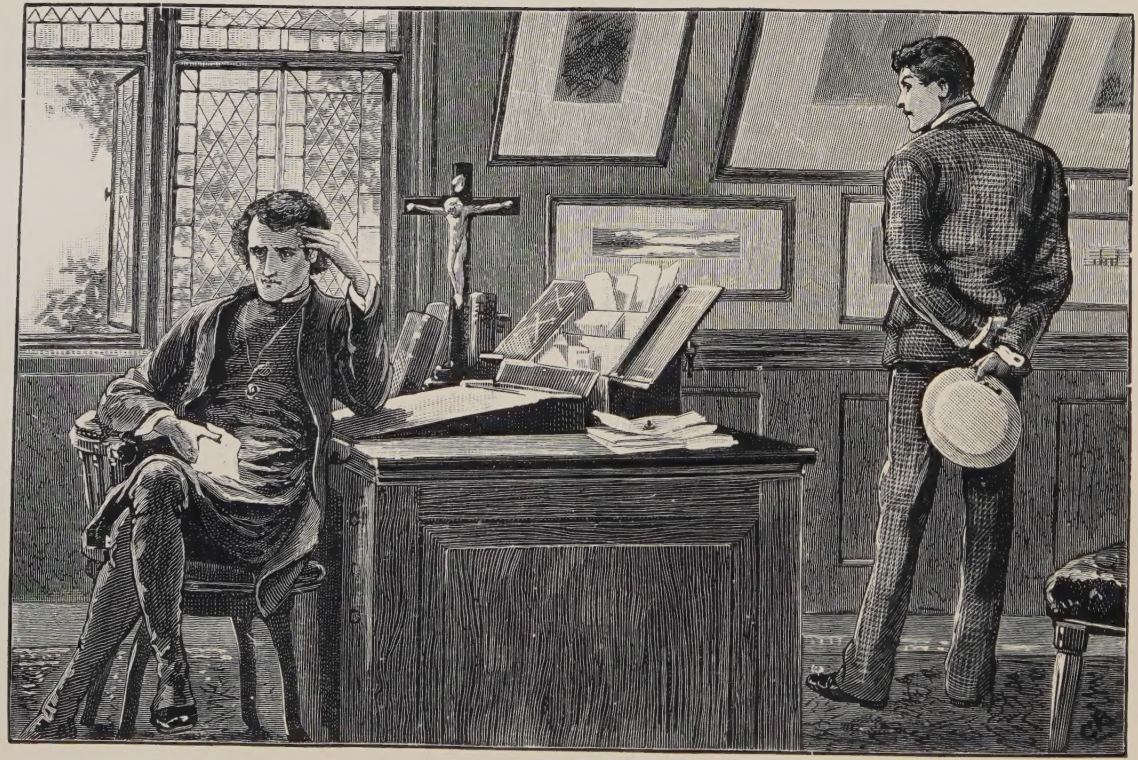

"The picture he made, sitting thus beneath the lattice, remained upon the young man's memory for ever."

Part III., chap. 2

THE SILENCE

OF

DEAN MAITLAND

A NOVEL

BY

MAXWELL GRAY
(Mary Gleed Tuttiett. 1847-1923)

„Denn alle Schuld rächt ſich auf Erden"

LONDON
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PART I.

"Not poppy, nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou ow'dst yesterday."

THE SILENCE

OF

DEAN MAITLAND.

CHAPTER I.

The grey afternoon was wearing on to its chill close; the dark cope of immovable dun cloud overhead seemed to contract and grow closer to the silent world beneath it; and the steep, chalky hill, leading from the ancient village, with its hoary castle and church, up over the bleak, barren down, was a weary thing to climb.

The solitary traveller along that quiet road moved her limbs more slowly, and felt her breath coming more quickly and shortly, as she mounted higher and higher, and the grey massive tower lessened and gradually sank out of sight behind her. But she toiled bravely on between the high tangled hedges, draped with great curtains of traveller's joy, now a mass of the silvery seed-feathers which the country children call "old man's beard," and variegated with the deep-purple leaves of dogwood, the crimson of briony and roseberry, the gleaming black of privet, and the gold and orange reds of ivy hangings; and, though her pace slackened to a mere crawl, she did not pause till she reached the brow of the hill, where the hedges ceased, and the broad white high-road wound over the open down.

Here, where the enclosed land ended, was a five-barred gate in the wild hedgerow, and here the weary pedestrian, depositing the numerous parcels she carried on the ground at her feet, rested, her arms supported on the topmost bar, and her face and the upper portion of her tall figure traced clearly against the grey gloomy sky. Some linnets fluttered out of the hedge beside her,

one or two silent larks sprang up from the turf of the downland sloping away from the gate, and some rooks sailed cawing overhead. All else was still with the weird, dreamy stillness that hangs over the earth on a day of chill east-wind haze.

There is a brooding expectancy about such a day that works strongly on the imagination, and suggests the dark possibilities of irresistible Fate. There is an austere poetry in the purple grey, breathless earth and the dark, unchanging sky, and a mute pathos in the quiet hush of weary Nature, thus folding her hands for rest, which has an unutterable charm for some temperaments, and touches far deeper chords than those vibrated by the brilliance and joyous tumult of life and song in the pleasant June-time. There is something of the infinite in the very monotony of the colouring; the breathless quiet, the vagueness of outline, and dimness of the all-enfolding mist are full of mystery, and invest the most commonplace objects with romance.

The sense of infinity was deepened in this case by the vast sweep of the horizon which bounded our pedestrian's gaze. The grey fallows and wan stubble-fields sloped swiftly away from the gate to a bottom of verdant pastures dotted with trees and homesteads; beyond them were more dim fields, and then a wide belt of forest, principally of firs. To the right, the valley, in which nestled the now unseen tower of Chalkburne, widened out, bounded by gentle hills, till the stream indicating its direction became a river, on the banks of which stood the mist-veiled town of Oldport, the tall tower of whose church rose light, white, and graceful against the iron-grey sky, emulating in the glory of its maiden youth—for it had seen but two lustres—the hoary grandeur of its mediæval parent at Chalkburne. Beyond the town, the river rolled on, barge-laden, to the sea, the faint blue line of which was blurred by a maze of masts where the estuary formed a harbour.

To the left of the tired gazer stretched a wide champaign, rich in woodland, and bounded in the far distance by two chalky summits, at whose steep bases surged the unseen sea, quiet to-day on the surface, but sullen with the heavy roar of the ground-swell beneath. Here and there, in the breaks of wood and forest on the horizon, Alma's accustomed eyes saw some faint grey touches which in bright summer were tiny bays of sapphire sea.

Alma Lee herself made a bright point of interest in the afternoon greyness, as she leant wearily, and not ungracefully, on the gate, her face and figure outlined clearly against the dark sky. Her dress was a bright blue, and her scarlet plaid shawl, fastened tightly about her shoulders, revealed and suggested, as only a shawl can, a full, supple form, indicative of youth and health. Her

dark, thick hair was crowned by a small velvet hat, adorned with a bright bird's wing; and her dark eyes and well-formed features, reposeful and indifferent as they were at the moment, suggested latent vehemence and passion. Her hands and feet were large, the former bare, and wrapped in the gay shawl for warmth.

Alma was not thinking of the mystery and infinite possibility suggested by the grey landscape before her; still less was she dreaming of the tragic shades Fate was casting even now upon her commonplace path. Unsuspecting and innocent she stood, lost in idle thought, deaf to the steps of approaching doom, and knowing nothing of the lives that were to be so tragically entangled in the mazes of her own. Could she but have had one glimpse of the swift-coming future, with what horror would the simple country girl have started back and struggled against the first suspicion of disaster!

The silence was presently broken by four mellow, slowly falling strokes from the grey belfry of Chalkburne; then all was still again, and Alma began to pick up her parcels. Suddenly she heard the sound of hoofs and wheels, and, dropping her packages, turned once more to the gate, and appeared a very statue of contemplation by the time a dog-cart, drawn by a high-stepping chesnut, and driven by a spick-and-span groom, fair-haired and well-featured, drew up beside her, and the groom sprang lightly to the ground.

"Come, Alma," he said, approaching the pensive figure, which appeared unconscious of him, "you won't say no now? You look dog-tired."

"I shall say exactly what I please, Mr. Judkins," she replied.

"Then say yes, and jump up. Chesnut is going like a bird, and will have you at Swaynestone in no time. Do say yes, do ee now."

"Thank you, I intend to walk."

"Just think what a way it is to walk to Swaynestone, and you so tired."

"I am not tired."

"Then, why are you leaning on that there gate?"

"I am admiring the view, since you are so very inquisitive."

"Oh Lord! the view! There's a deal more view to be seen from the seat of this here cart, and it's pleasant flying along like a bird. Come now, Alma, let me help you up."

"Mr. Judkins, will you have the kindness to drive on? I said in Oldport that I intended to walk. It's very hard a person mayn't do as she pleases without all this worry," replied Alma, impatiently.

"Wilful woman mun have her way," murmured the young fellow, ruefully. "Well, let me carry them parcels home, at least."

"I intend to carry them myself, thank you. Good afternoon;" and Alma turned her back upon the mortified youth, and appeared lost in the charms of landscape.

"Well, darn it! if you won't come, you won't; that's flat!" the young man exclaimed angrily. "This is your nasty pride, Miss Alma; but, mind you, pride goes before a fall," he added, springing to his perch, and sending the high-stepper flying along the level down-road like the wind, with many expressions of anger and disappointment, and sundry backward glances at Alma, who gazed with unruffled steadiness on the fields.

"I wonder," she mused, "why a person always hates a person who makes love to them? I liked Charlie Judkins well enough before he took on with this love-nonsense."

And she did not know that by declining that brief drive she had refused the one chance of escaping all the subsequent tragedy, and that her fate was even now approaching in the growing gloom.

But what is this fairy music ascending from the direction of Chalkburne, and growing clearer and louder every moment? Sweet, melodious, drowsily cheery, ring out five tiny merry peals of bells, each peal accurately matched with the other, and consisting of five tones. The music comes tumbling down in sweet confusion, peal upon peal, chime breaking into chime, in a sort of mirthful strife of melody, through all which a certain irregular rhythm is preserved, which keeps the blending harmonies from degenerating into dissonance. With a sweep and a clash and a mingling of sleepy rapture, the elfin music filled all the quiet hazy air around Alma, and inspired her with vague pleasure as she turned her head listening in the direction of the dulcet sounds, and discerned their origin in the nodding head of a large silk-coated cart-horse looming through the haze.

He was a handsome, powerful fellow, stepping firmly up the hill with the happy consciousness of doing good service which seems to animate all willing, well-behaved horses, and emerging into full view at the head of four gallant comrades, each nodding and stepping as cheerily as himself, with a ponderous waggon behind them. Each horse wore his mane in love-locks, combed over his eyes, the hair on the massive neck being tied here and there with bows of bright woollen ribbon. Each tail was carefully plaited at its spring from the powerful haunches for a few inches; then it was tied with another bright knot, beneath which the remainder of the tail swept in untrammelled abundance almost

down to the pasterns, the latter hidden by long fringes coming to the ground. The ponderous harness shone brightly on the broad, shining brown bodies, and, as each horse carried a leading-rein, thickly studded with brass bosses and fastened to the girth, and there was much polished brass about headstall, saddle, and collar, they presented a very glittering appearance.

But the crowning pride of every horse, and the source of all the music which was then witching the wintry air, was the lofty erection springing on two branching wires from every collar, and towering far above the pricked ears of the proud steeds. These wires bore a long narrow canopy placed at right angles to the horse's length, and concealing beneath a deep fringe of bright scarlet worsted the little peal of nicely graduated bells. Balls of the same bright worsted studded the roof of the little canopy, and finished the gay trappings of the sturdy rustics, who bore these accumulated honours with a sort of meek rapture.

The waggon these stout fellows drew needed all their bone and sinew to bring it up and down the steep, hilly roads. Its hind-wheels were as high as Alma's head; their massive felloes, shod with double tires, were a foot broad; the naves were like moderate-sized casks. High over the great hind wheels arched the waggon's ledge in a grand sweep, descending with a boat-like curve to the smaller front wheels, whence it rose again, ending high over the wheeler's haunches, like the prow of some old ship over the sea. A massive thing of solid timber it was, with blue wheels and red body, slightly toned by weather. On the front, in red letters on a yellow ground, was painted, "Richard Long, Malbourne, 1860."

Two human beings, who interrupted the fairy music with strange gutturals and wild ejaculations to the steeds, mingled with sharp whip-cracks, accompanied this imposing equipage. One was a tall, straight-limbed man in fustian jacket and trousers, a coat slung hussar-wise from his left shoulder, and a cap worn slightly to one side, with a pink chrysanthemum stuck in it. His sunburnt face was almost the hue of his yellow-brown curls and short beard; his eyes were blue; and his strong, laboured gait resembled that of his horses. The other was a beardless lad, his satellite, similarly arrayed, minus the flower. Sparks flew from the road when the iron hoofs and heavy iron boots struck an occasional flint. When the great waggon was fairly landed on the brow of the hill, the horses were brought to by means of sundry strange sounds and violent gestures on the part of the men, and, with creaking and groaning and halloing, the great land-ship came to anchor, the elfin chimes dropped into silence, interrupted by

little bursts of melody at every movement of the horses, and the lad seized a great wooden mallet and thrust beneath the hind wheel. The carter leant placidly against the ponderous shaft with his face to Alma, and struck a match to kindle his replenished pipe.

"Coldish," he observed, glancing with surly indifference towards her.

"It is cold," returned Alma, drawing her shawl cosily round her graceful shoulders; while the wheeler, stimulated into curiosity by his master's voice, turned round to look at Alma, and shook out a little peal of bells, which roused the emulation of his four brothers, who each shook out a little chime on his own account; while the waggoner glanced slowly round the vast horizon, and, after some contemplation, said in a low, bucolic drawl—

"Gwine to hrain, I 'lows."

"It looks like it," replied Alma. "How is your wife, William?"

The waggoner again interrogated the horizon for inspiration, and, after some thought, answered with a jerk, "Neuce the same."

"I hope she will soon be about again," said Alma; and the leader emphasized her words by shaking a little music from his canopy, and thus stimulated his brothers to do likewise. "You come home lighter than you set out," she added, looking at the nearly empty waggon, which she had seen pass in the morning filled with straw.

William turned slowly round and gazed inquiringly at the waggon, as if struck by a new idea, for some moments; then he said, "Ay." After this he looked thoughtfully at Alma and her parcels for some moments, until his soul again found expression in the words, "Like a lift?" the vague meaning of which was elucidated by the pointing of his whip towards the waggon.

Alma assented, and with the waggoner's assistance soon found herself, with all her merchandise, comfortably installed in the great waggon, which was empty save for a few household and farming necessaries from Oldport. Before mounting—a feat, by the way, not unworthy of a gymnast—she stroked the wheel horse's thick silken coat admiringly.

"You do take care of your horses at Malbourne, William," she said. "I heard father say this morning he never saw a better-groomed and handsomer team than yours."

William went on silently arranging Alma's seat, and stowing her parcels for her; but a smile dawned at the corners of his mouth, and gradually spread itself over the whole of his face, and his pleasure at length found a vent, when he reached the ground, in a sounding thwack of his broad hand on the wheeler's massive

flank—a thwack that set the bells a-tremble on the horse's neck, and sent a sympathetic shiver of music through all the emulous brotherhood.

"Ay," he observed, with a broad smile of admiration along the line of softly swaying tails and gently moving heads, with their nostrils steaming in the cold air; "he med well say that."

"Ay," echoed Jem, the satellite, removing the sledge mallet from the wheel and striding to the front, with a reflection of his chief's pleasure in his ruddy face as he glanced affectionately at the team, "that he med."

It was not Alma's admiration which evoked such satisfaction —she was but a woman, and naturally could not tell a good horse from a donkey; but her father, Ben Lee, Sir Lionel Swaynestone's coachman, a man who had breathed the air of stables from his cradle, and who drove the splendid silk-coated, silver-harnessed steeds in the Swaynestone carriages, his opinion was something. With a joyous crack of the whip, and a strange sound from the recesses of his throat, William bid his team "Gee-up!"

The mighty hoofs took hold of the road, the great wheels slowly turned, a shower of confused harmony fell in dropping sweetness from the bells, and with creaking and groaning, and nodding heads, and rhythmic blending of paces and music, the waggon lumbered ponderously along the level chalk road which led, unenclosed by hedge or fence, over the open down.

To ride in a waggon with ease, and at the same time enjoy the surrounding landscape without a constant exercise of gymnastic skill in balancing and counter-balancing the body in response to the heavy swaying and jerking of the unwieldy machine, is difficult; to sit on the ledge is to be an acrobat; to lie on the floor is to see nothing but sky, besides having one's members violently wrenched one from the other. Alma, however, was very comfortably placed on a pile of sacks, which served as an arm-chair, deadened the jerking power of the motion, and left her head and shoulders above the ledge, so that she could well see the grey surrounding landscape in the deepening haze.

She leant back with a feeling of agreeable languor, wrapped her hands in her shawl, and gazed dreamily on the down rising steeply to the left, and forming, where chalk had been quarried in one place, a miniature precipice, crested with overhanging copse, rich in spring with fairy treasures of violets in white sheets over the moss, clusters of primroses and oxlips among the hazel stumps, blue lakes of hyacinth, and waving forests of anemone; and she gazed on the sloping fields, farmsteads, and bounding forest to the right, lulled by the steady music of the bells, among

which she heard from time to time William's satisfied growl of "Ay, he med well say that," and the occasional song of Jem, as he trudged along by the leader—

> "For to plough, and to sow, and to reap, and to mow,
> Is the work of the farmer's bu-oy-oy."

Happy and harmless she looked in her rustic chariot, as they rolled slowly along in the gathering gloom, now over a heathy stretch nearly at the summit of the down, past a lonely, steep-roofed, red-tiled hostelry, with a forge cheerily glowing by its side, whence the anvil-music rose and blended pleasantly with that of the bell-team, and over which hung a sign-board bearing the blacksmith's arms, the hammer, with the couplet inscribed beneath, "By hammer and hand, All arts do stand."

Downhill now, with the heavy drag cast beneath the wheel by mighty efforts on the part of Jem; then again on the level road, with the chalk down always rising to the left, and falling away to the right; past farmhouses, where the cattle stood grouped in the yard and the ducks quacked for their evening meal; then once more down a hill, steep and difficult, down to the level of a willow-shaded stream by a copse, outside which daffodils rioted all over the sloping lea descending to the brookside in spring; and then again up and up, with straining and panting and creaking, with iron feet pointed into and gripping the steep chalk road, with louder pealing of the fairy chimes, whose rhythm grows irregular and fitful, with strange shouts and gestures from the men, with "Whup!" and "Whoa!" and "Hither!" with many pauses, when the great heads droop, the music stops, and the mallet is brought into requisition.

Happy and harmless indeed was Alma, the lashes drooping over her rose-leaf cheeks, her fancies roving unfettered. She was hoping to get home betimes, for she had something nice for father's tea among her parcels, and she was thinking of the penny periodical folded up in her basket, and wondering how the heroine was getting on in the story which broke off abruptly at such an interesting moment in the last number. Was the peasant girl, in whom Alma detected a striking likeness to herself, really going to marry the poor young viscount who was so deplorably in love with her? She could not help furnishing the viscount with the form and features of Mr. Ingram Swaynestone, Sir Lionel's eldest son, though the latter was fair, while the viscount happened to be dark.

Now they are at the summit of the steep hill, and pause to breathe and replenish pipes. On one side is dense coppice; on

the other, Swaynestone Park slopes down in woodland, glade, and park-like meadow to the sea-bounded horizon. Then on again, up hill and down dale, past cottage and farmstead, with the park always sloping away to the sea on the right. Lights glow cheerily now from distant cottage windows, and they can even catch glimpses of lights from the façade of Swaynestone House between the trees occasionally, while the merry music peals on in its drowsy rhythm, and little showers of sparks rise at the contact of iron-shod wheel and foot with the flinty road.

They have just passed the entrance-gates of Swaynestone—lonely gates, unfurnished with a lodge—and the waggon stops with interrupted music at some smaller gates on the other side of the road, where the upland still rises, not in bare down, but in rich meadow, to a hanging wood, out of which peeps dimly in the dusk a small white structure, built with a colonnade supporting an architrave, to imitate a Greek temple—Alma's home.

"Ay! he med well say that," repeated the waggoner, still digesting the pleasure of Ben Lee's compliment, and slapping the wheel-horse's vast flank, so that the fairy chime began again, and the smack resounded like an accompaniment to its music. It was fairly dark in the road; the misty dusk of evening was overshadowed by the thick belt of chestnut, lime, and beech bounding the park by the roadside; and the large horn lantern was handed to Alma to aid her in gathering her parcels together, and its light fell upon her bright dark eyes, and rosy, dimpled cheeks, making her appear more than ever as if her gaudy dress was but a disguise assumed for a frolic. Her almond-shaped, rather melancholy eyes sparkled as she looked in the young carter's stolid face, and thanked him heartily.

"I have had such a nice ride," she added pleasantly, and the horses one by one dropped a bell-note or two to emphasize her words.

"You must gie I a toll for this yere ride," returned William, with a look of undisguised, but not rude admiration.

Alma flushed, and drew back. "How much do you want?" she asked, taking out her purse, and pretending not to understand.

"You put that there in your pocket," he replied, offended, "and gie I a kiss."

"Indeed, I shall do nothing of the kind," retorted Alma. "Let me get down. I'll never ride with you again, if I walk till I drop—that I won't."

But the waggoner insisted on his toll, and vowed that she should not descend till it was paid; and poor Alma protested

and stormed vainly, whilst Jem leaned up against a horse and laughed, and adjured her to make haste. Alma burst into tears, wrung her hands, and wished that she had not been so obdurate to poor Charlie Judkins. He would not have been so rude, she knew. Nor, indeed, would William have been so persistent had she not offended him by her unlucky offer of money, and roused the dogged obstinacy of his class. She darted to the other side of the waggon, but in vain; William was too quick, and she was just on the point of raising her voice, in the hope that her father might be near, when a light, firm step was heard issuing from the park gates, and a clear and singularly musical voice broke into the dispute with a tone of authority.

"For shame, William Grove!" it said. "How can you be so cowardly? Let the girl go directly. Why, it is Alma Lee, surely!"

CHAPTER II.

THE speaker emerged into the little circle of light cast by the lantern—a slight, well-built, youthful figure of middle height yet commanding presence, clad in dark grey, with a round, black straw hat and a neat white necktie, the frequent costume of a country curate in those days, when the clerical garb had not reached so high a stage of evolution as at present. His beardless face made him look still younger than he really was; his features were refined and clearly cut; his hair very dark; and his eyes, the most striking feature of his face, were of that rare, dazzling light blue which can only be compared to a cloudless, noon sky in June, when the pale, intense blue seems penetrated to overflowing with floods of vivid light.

"I waren't doing no harm," returned the waggoner, with a kind of surly respect; "I gied she a ride, and she med so well gie I a kiss."

"And you a married man!" cried the indignant young deacon; "for shame!"

"There ain't no harm in a kiss," growled William, with a sheepish, discomfited look, while he stood aside and suffered the new-comer to help Alma in her descent.

"There is great harm in insulting a respectable young woman, and taking advantage of her weakness. As for a kiss, it is not a seemly thing between young people who have no claim on each

other, though there may be no positive harm in it. You ought to know better, William."

"There ain't no harm for the likes of we," persisted the waggoner. "'Tain't as though Alma was a lady; she's only a poor man's daughter."

"And a poor man's daughter has as much right to men's respect as a duchess," cried the young fellow, with animation. "I wonder you can say such a thing, Grove. And you a poor man yourself, with a little daughter of your own! How would you like her to be kissed against her will?"

William muttered to the effect that "Anybody med kiss she"—which was true enough, as she had seen but three summers yet—and went on twining his whip with a cowed, injured look, while Alma gazed in awed admiration at her handsome young champion, whose kindling eyes seemed to send forth floods of pale-blue light in the gloom.

"There is something so unmanly in attacking a girl's self-respect," continued the eager champion. "I did not think you capable of it, William. A stout fellow like you, a man I always liked. Go home to your wife, and think better of it. I will see you across the meadow myself, Alma, though it is hard that a girl cannot be abroad alone at this hour."

So saying, the young Bayard possessed himself of sundry of Alma's parcels, and with a pleasant "Good night, Jem," turned his back on the waggon and opened the gate, through which Alma passed quickly, followed by her protector, while the cumbrous waggon went on its way to the rhythmic jangle of the sweetly clashing bells, and William trudged stolidly on with his accustomed whip-crackings and guttural exclamations, murmuring from time to time with a mortified air, "There ain't no harm in a kiss!" And, indeed, he meant no harm, though he took care not to relate the incident to his wife; it was only his rough tribute to Alma's unaccustomed beauty, and signified no more than a gracefully turned allusion in higher circles. "And Mr. Cyril must go a-spiling of she," he added, "as though she didn't look too high already. But pride goes before a fall, as I've heerd 'un zay." Ominous repetition of Judkins's words!

Alma, in the mean time, murmured her thanks to her chivalrous protector, and stepped up the dewy meadow with a beating breast and a flushing cheek, her ears tingling with the words, "A poor man's daughter has as much right to respect as a duchess," her heart swelling at the memory of the courtesy with which Maitland handed her down from the waggon and carried half her parcels; she knew that a veritable duchess would not have been treated

with more honour. All her life she had known Cyril Maitland She had sported with him over that very lea, where the tall yellow cowslips nodded in spring, and where they had pelted each other with sweet, heavy cowslip-balls; she had kissed and cuffed him many a time, though he was always "Master Cyril" to the coachman's child; and, as they grew up, had been inclined to discuss him with a half-respectful, half-familiar disparagement, such as well-known objects receive. Never till that fatal evening had his grace of mind and person, and the singular charm of his manner, keenly touched her. But when he stood there in the lantern's dim rays, looking so handsome and so animated by the impulsive chivalry with which he defended her, and she heard the musical tones and refined accents of the voice pleading her cause and the cause of her sex and her class, a new spirit came to her—a spirit of sweetness and of terror, which set all her nerves quivering, and opened a new world of wonder and beauty to her entranced gaze. As holy as a young archangel, and as beautiful, he seemed to the simple girl's dazzled thoughts, and she felt that no harm could ever come to her in that charmed presence, no pain ever touch her.

All unconscious of the tumult of half-conscious emotion awakening beside him, Cyril Maitland walked on, chatting with pleasant ease on all sorts of homely topics, in no wise surprised at his companion's faltering, incoherent replies, which he attributed to the embarrassment from which he had just delivered her. The dulcet clashing of the bells grew fainter, and then rose on a sudden gust of wind just as they reached the door of the strangely built white house, before the square windows of which rose a small colonnade of white pillars. Alma opened the door, and a ruddy glow rushed out upon her, while within a cheerful little home-scene presented itself. A small table, covered with a clean white cloth, touched with rose by the firelight, and spread with tea-things, was drawn up before the glowing hearth, and a warm aroma of tea and toast greeted the tired, hungry girl. Before the fire sat a strong, middle-aged man in an undress livery, consisting partly of a sleeved waistcoat, busily engaged in making toast; while a neatly dressed woman moved about the warm parlour, adding a few touches to the table.

"Just in time, Alma," called out the man, without turning his head.

"And a pretty time, too," added the woman, who was Alma's stepmother. "Why hadn't you a come along with Charlie Judkins this hour agone? Gadding about till it's dark night—— Oh, Mr. Cyril, I beg your pardon, sir!" and she dropped a curtsey, while her husband turned, and rose.

"May I come in?" asked Cyril, pausing, hat in hand, and smiling his genial smile. "Your tea is very tempting, Mrs. Lee."

"Come in and welcome, Master Cyril," said the coachman, as Cyril, with the air of an accustomed guest, placed his hat on a side-table adorned with the family Bible, workboxes, and tea-trays, and took the chair Mrs. Lee handed him.

"Why, I've not had tea with you for an age," continued Cyril, stroking a large tabby cat, which sprang purring upon his knee the moment he was seated; "and I don't deserve any now, since I come straight from the drawing-room at Swaynestone, where the rites of the teapot were being celebrated. But the ladies there have no idea of tea-making, and I only had two cups, and was tantalized with a vague sketch of a piece of bread and butter."

"Well, you always were a rare one for tea, Master Cyril," returned his hostess. "If I had but known you were coming, I'd 'a made some of them hot cakes. But there's jam in plenty, some blackberry as Alma made this fall."

"Alma came by Long's waggon," he explained, when she had withdrawn to lay aside her hat and shawl; "and as I chanced to be at the gate when she got down, I saw her across the meadow."

"Thank 'ee kindly, Master Cyril. I don't like her to be out alone at nights," said Ben Lee; "though, to be sure, there's only our own people about on the estate."

Before Alma's mind there arose a vision of the Swaynestone drawing-room as she had seen it once at tea-time when she was summoned to speak to the young ladies about some needlework she was doing for them. She saw in imagination the long range of windows with their rich curtains; the mirrors and couches; the cabinets filled with rare and costly *bric-à-brac;* the statuettes and pictures; the painted ceiling of the long, lofty room; the beautiful chimney-piece of sculptured Parian marble; the rich glow from the hearth throwing all kinds of warm reflections upon the splendid apartment, and principally upon the little table, laden with silver and priceless china, by the fire; and the charming group of ladies in their stylish dress and patrician beauty, half seen in the fire-lit dusk. It was a world of splendour to Alma's unaccustomed eyes—a place in which an ordinary mortal could in no wise sit down with any comfort, without, indeed, a something almost amounting to sacrilege; a world in which the perfume of hot-house flowers took away the bated breath, and in which no footfall dared echo, where voices were low and musical, and manners full of courteous ease; a world inhabited by beings untouched by common cares, with other thoughts, and softer, more beautifully adorned lives; a world which Alma

entered with a burdensome sense of being out of place, in which she only spoke when spoken to, and where she heard herself discussed as if she were a thing without hearing.

"What! is this Lee's daughter?" Lady Swaynestone had asked, putting up her gold-rimmed glasses, and taking a quiet survey of Alma and her blushes.

"Surely you remember little Alma Lee, mother," Ethel Swaynestone replied. "She has shot up, you see, like the rest of us."

"Ah, to be sure! How the time goes, Ethel! How is your mother, Alma? And she is embroidering Maude's handkerchiefs? A very nice employment for a young woman. But I don't like her gown; it is far too smart for a coachman's daughter."

"Nonsense, mother dear. Why shouldn't she be smart, if she likes? But if you want really to look nice, Alma, you must not wear violet and pale blue together," said the fair-haired Maude, with a sweet look of interest in Alma's appearance that won her heart, wounded as it was by "her ladyship's" want of consideration.

Very glad was Alma to retire from that august presence—almost as glad as she had been to enter it. And Mr. Cyril had walked straight from the splendid apartment, from the light of Miss Ethel and Miss Maude's eyes, and the sound of their sweet, refined voices, with a disparaging remark upon their tea, and chosen Alma's own humble everyday dwelling and homely meal in the narrow room in preference. This filled her with a strange, indefinable emotion, half pleasure and half pain. Some instinct told her that he was the same welcomed, admired guest there as here; that he spoke with the same easy charm to Lady Swaynestone and her daughters and the high-born visitors he chanced to meet there as to her parents and herself. And could her imagination have borne her into Cyril's future, she would have seen him, as he subsequently was, a welcomed frequent guest at royal tables, where his beautiful voice and perfect manner cast the same glamour over the palace atmosphere as over that of the coachman's little dwelling.

Quickly as Alma returned to the parlour, she yet found time to arrange her rich hair and add a necklace of amber beads, thus imparting a kind of gipsy splendour to her dark face, and other little trifles to her dress; and very handsome she looked in the firelight—for the one candle but emphasized the gloom—with that new sparkle in her eyes and flush on her cheek. It was Cyril who recommended her to toast the sausages she had brought from Oldport instead of frying them; he and Lilian had often cooked them so in the schoolroom at home, he said, when Mrs.

Lee demurred at trusting to his culinary skill. It was Cyril also who suggested the agreeable addition of cold potatoes warmed up.

"Well, Master Cyril, I never thought to see you teach my wife cooking," laughed Ben, paying a practical compliment to his skill. "Hand Master Cyril some tea, Alma; and do you taste the sausages, my girl. Why, where's your appetite after tramping all the way into Oldport, and nothing but a bit of bread and cheese since breakfast? You shan't walk there and back again any more; that and the shopping is too much. And so you came along part of the way in Long's waggon, when you might have been tooled along by the best horse in our stables, and Judkins fit to cry about it. Now, don't you call that silly, Mr. Cyril?"

"Every one to his taste, Ben. I prefer the dog-cart."

"And it ain't every day a girl like Alma gets a chance of riding behind such a horse or beside such a young man," added Mrs. Lee, severely. "But there's people as never knows where their bread's buttered."

"There are people," said Alma, with a toss of her graceful head, "as know what they've a mind to do, and do it."

"And there's headstrong girls as lives to repent," retorted the stepmother.

"Ay, you was always a wilful one, Alma," said her father; "but if you don't look out you'll be a old maid, and you won't like that. And a smarter fellow than Charlie Judkins never crossed a horse. No drink with Charlie—goes to church regular, and has a matter of fifty pound in the bank, and puts by every week. And Sir Lionel ready to find him a cottage and raise his wages when he marries."

"Well, let him marry, then," returned Alma, airily; "*I* don't want to prevent him. I dare say Mr. Cyril would be kind enough to perform the ceremony, if he wished it."

"I should have the greatest pleasure, Alma, particularly if he chose a certain friend of mine. For, as your father says, Charlie is a really good fellow, as warm-hearted a man as I know, and deserves a good wife."

"There are plenty of good wives to be had," returned Alma; "no doubt Mr. Judkins will soon find one, especially as he has so many friends to put in a word for him."

"Ay, and he might have the pick of girls in Malbourne, and five miles round," added Mrs. Lee.

"And Charlie won't stand Alma's hoity-toity airs much longer," chimed in her father. "He was terrible angry this afternoon, and talked about stuck-up faggots, he did. And you rising twenty-two,

and refused Mr. Ingram's own man. I don't know what 'd be good enough for ye, Alma, I don't, without 'twas Mr. Ingram hisself. Ain't she a wilful one, Mr. Cyril?"

"We mustn't be hard upon her, Ben. She has a right to refuse a man if she doesn't care for him. But any girl might think twice before refusing Charlie Judkins," said Cyril, in his gentle, gracious way. "I was to tell you, Mrs. Lee," he added, "that we are running short of eggs at the Rectory, and ask if your fowls were laying enough to spare?"

"Ourn have mostly give over laying, but Mrs. Maitland shall have a dozen so soon as Alma can get over to-morrow. Why, you don't bide at the Rectory now, sir?"

"No. I have rooms in my own parish at Shotover," he replied; "but I am always running in and out at home. It is only a mile and a half, you know; and Shotover is such a tiny parish, it leaves us very idle."

"That's well for your book-learning, Mr. Cyril. I reckon you have to know a good deal more before you can be priested next Trinity. When are ye coming over to Malbourne to preach to we?"

"Oh, not for a long while, Ben. I feel as if I could never have the assurance to preach to all you grave and reverend seigniors. I don't even preach at Shotover, if I can help it," he replied, with an air of ingenuous modesty that became him well.

"You mun get over that, sir," continued Ben; "you mun think of Timothy. He was to let no man despise his youth, you mind."

"Certainly, Ben. But I have only been ordained three months, and I may well hold my tongue till I have learned a little wisdom. Ah, Ben, you can't imagine what a dreadful ordeal it is to preach one's first sermon! I feel cold water running down my back when I think of it. They say my face was whiter than my surplice, and my voice sounded so loud and strange in my ears I thought it must frighten people, instead of which they could scarcely hear me."

"Lauk-a-mercy, Mr. Cyril, you'll soon get over that," said Mrs. Lee, in a tone of consolation. "That's just how I felt the first time I acted parlourmaid, Jane being took ill, and a party to dinner, and I housemaid. You mid 'a seen the glasses knock up agen the decanter when I filled them, the jellies all a-tremble with the palpitations—not to mention the first time I walked into Malbourne Church with Lee, and made sure I should a dropped every step I took up the aisle, and all them boys staring, and your pa beginning 'the wicked man.' But law! I thinks nothing of it now."

"You may still hear my teeth chatter in Shotover Church, nevertheless, Mrs. Lee," replied Cyril, softly stroking the cat, which still nestled purring on his knee, and casting an amused glance on Mrs. Lee and on Alma, whose face expressed the most sympathetic interest. "But, as you say, I shall get over it in time. And, indeed, if the congregation consisted of Alma, and Lilian, and Mr. Ingram Swaynestone, and his sisters, I shouldn't mind preaching at Malbourne. Fellow-sinners of my own age are not so appalling."

"Ay, with a head like yourn, you med be a bishop some day," observed Lee, thoughtfully. "What's this yere thing they made ye at college? somat to do with quarrelling?"

"A wrangler."

"Ah! You may depend upon it, it's a fine thing to be a wrangler. Mr. Ingram, now, they only made he a rustic; but he was at t'other place—Oxford, they calls it."

"He was rusticated," said Cyril, gravely. "That is not so advantageous as being made a wrangler."

"You see, I was right, after all, mother," Alma interposed; "and you always would have it that Mr. Cyril was a mangler. As if they had mangles at Cambridge!"

"You'd better be less forward with your tongue, and get on with your vittles, miss. Why, bless the girl, she's eat nothing, and if that ain't the third time she've put sugar into the milk-jug by mistake! Why, father, whatever's come to her?"

Alma blushed prettily, but her confusion almost amounted to distress; and Cyril, with his ready tact, again drew attention from her.

"You must not imagine," he said, "that I have to pass my time in strife and dissension because I am a wrangler. Quite the contrary. Thank you for the tea, Mrs. Lee. Good night, Ben;" and, placing the cat very gently on the warm hearth, and shaking hands with his hosts, Cyril rose, took his hat, and followed Alma out into the darkness.

She bore the candle, and by its light guided him to the little wicket at the end of the garden, where, with a curtsey, she bid him good night.

"Good night, Alma," he returned carelessly, and stepped briskly down the dark meadow, the grass of which was crisped now by frost; while Alma remained at the wicket, that he might have the benefit of the candle's feeble ray.

When he was half-way across, he suddenly stopped and turned.

"Oh, Alma!" he cried, retracing his steps, when she looked up with startled inquiry in his face, "I quite forgot the very thing

I came for." Here he paused, overcome with surprise at the vivid, tense expression of Alma's bright face, and a ray of illumination shot over the something he had observed in the house, the absent manner and the lack of appetite, and accounted for her disparagement of the enamoured Judkins. By these signs he knew that Alma was in love with some other swain. "I quite forgot Miss Lilian's message to you. My sister is getting up a Bible-class for young women, and she wishes you to join. She is to hold it in her room at the Rectory after evensong on Sunday afternoons. Will you come?"

"Oh, I don't know, Mr. Cyril! You see, I should be dark home these winter nights," returned Alma, hesitating and blushing, and looking up at Cyril and down on the frosted grass and up again.

"Well, you can talk it over with Miss Lilian when you bring the eggs. I think we might get over the difficulty of getting home in the dark. If that was all, I might see you home myself."

"Oh, Mr. Cyril!"

There was a quiver and flash of illumination in the words and look of the simple, unconscious girl which shot like electric flame through her interlocutor's frame, and made him speechless. The blue radiance from his eyes mingled for a moment with the dark fire of Alma's, and a strange, unaccustomed tremor, that was not all pain, set his pulses beating as they were not used to beat, and stirred all the currents of his blood.

"Good night, Alma," he said shortly, and in a voice so unlike his own that the girl stood petrified in pained amazement; and he turned, and sped swiftly over the crisp grass to the gate, glad to be out of the influence of the solitary candle's dim light.

He let the gate fall-to with a clash which made it vibrate backwards and forwards for some minutes before it found rest, and strode rapidly over the dark highway beneath the trees.

"What have I done?" he muttered, with a beating heart. "Oh, my God! I meant no harm. What have I done?"

Yet the warm, delicious glow still lingered, paining him, in his breast, and he strode on with his head bent down, humbled and wretched. His soul was yet spotless as the untrodden snow; all his hopes and tastes were innocent; the fierce flame of temptation had never yet cast its scorching glare upon him; hitherto he had deemed himself invulnerable. In his trouble, he put his hand instinctively in his pockets, where nestled as usual the rubbed covers of his "Visitations and Prayers for the Sick," and other devotional books, and was comforted. He lifted his head, and felt in his breast-pocket for a letter, the pressure of which, though

he could not read it beneath that dark dome of solid night, fully restored the serenity to his face. It began, "Dearest Cyril," and ended, "Ever affectionately yours, Marion Everard;" it alluded to the pains of separation, and the hopes expressed by Cyril of a possible marriage in a year's time.

They had been engaged a whole year, and the necessity of waiting another year before marriage was the tragedy of their young lives. A year seemed an eternity to them, and the life they passed apart from each other no life. A vision of Marion's gentle face brightened the curtain of thick darkness spread before Cyril. He recalled her tones and looks with a rush of sweet affection—all the tender looks she had ever given him, and they were many; but he could not recall any one look that resembled the glance of fervid, unquenchable passion which flashed from Alma's tell-tale eyes in that fatal moment at the gate. Such a look he had beheld in no woman's eyes; such a look, he feared, in the narrowness of his serene purity, could light no good woman's eyes.

He was wrong. The flame which burnt in poor, innocent Alma's breast, and which her guileless nature so rashly and unconsciously betrayed, descended like a celestial glory upon her life with a purifying and strengthening power, which could have lifted her to unimagined summits of heroism.

There are people whose lives are never touched by passion, and who, when they come in contact with it, recognize only its strength, which they dread, and condemn its mysteries as baleful. Such was Cyril in these white young days of his before any shadow fell upon his sunny, safe path. Such was not Cyril in after-days, when the agony of the penitent and the evildoer found a responsive echo in his heart, and made him pitiful and lenient in judging character and discriminating motives. But to-night, in spite of the momentary glow for which he so despised himself, he drew the robe of the Pharisee about his upright soul, and cast a stone of condemnation upon the sufferer as he passed her swiftly by.

Alma remained statue-like, with her solitary light painting a feeble halo on the all-encompassing gloom, until Cyril's steps had ceased to echo along the lonely highway, and her mother called to her to bring back the candle and shut the door.

As soon as she had obeyed, she found a pretext for going to her room, and there, sitting down on the edge of the bed in the dark, she burst into tears.

"I am tired, and William Grove frightened me," she said to herself; and a few minutes later she was at needlework in the parlour, singing like any wild bird.

CHAPTER III.

A WARM glimmer of ruddy light on the thick darkness told Cyril of the approach of the wheelwright's house and shop, and, passing this and descending the hill, he became aware of the rich crimson which marked the lower windows of the Sun Inn, and found himself at the end of the wheelwright's yard, at the meeting of four roads. Opposite the Sun, and coloured by its light, a sign-post reared itself at the corner, oblique, and appearing to gesticulate madly with its outspread arms. This corner turned, all the village sparkled out in a little constellation of cottage casements before his gaze; and there, beyond the brook, which murmured faintly in the stillness, the Rectory windows shone out among masses of foliage, or rather of branches, behind which the grey church spire lifted itself unseen in the mirk. As soon as Cyril's foot was within the gate, a sudden illumination from the hall door, which simultaneously opened, poured itself upon the drive, and showed him the outline of a woman's young and graceful figure in the porch.

"Did you hear me coming, Lilian?" asked he, entering the house. "Your hearing must indeed be acute."

"Did we hear him, Mark Antony?" echoed Lilian, addressing a magnificent black cat, with white breast and paws, which had been sitting upon the step at her feet, and gazing with grave expectancy down the drive till Cyril reached the door, when he rose, and respectfully greeted him with elevated tail and gentle mews, interspersed with purring. "You know that puss and I have an extra sense, which tells us when you are coming," she replied lightly, as she passed her arm through his, and led him through the little hall into the drawing-room, on the threshold of which a terrier and a pug sprang out to greet the new-comer with short barks of joy and sudden bounds and various wild expressions of delight—an indiscreet behaviour, quietly rebuked by two swift but dignified strokes of Mark Antony's white velvet paw, which sent the heedless animals, with dismal yelps and mortified tails, to a respectful distance.

A lady lay on a sofa near the fire, and a boy and a girl of some eight and nine years rolled on the hearthrug with some toys. These children, with Cyril and Lilian, who were twins, constituted the sole remainder of Mrs. Maitland's once too numerous family. What with bearing and rearing them all, and the sorrow of losing so many, her strength was now exhausted, and the prime of her

life was passed chiefly on that sofa, among its warm rugs. Cyril bent to kiss her, and a look of pride and joy lighted her pale, refined face as she gazed upon him.

The children sprang upon Cyril, and he, having caressed them, took a seat by Lilian, who was at the writing-table, from which she had risen on his approach.

"Will it do?" he asked, gazing upon some manuscript before her.

"I think so," she replied. "I have drawn a line through the most ornate passages. But you must really try and adapt yourself to your congregation, Cyril. This goes completely over their heads. Be less elaborate, and speak from your heart, simply and honestly."

"The discipline which turns out wranglers," observed Cyril, with a dry little smile, "does not train popular rustic preachers."

"Cyril's sermons again?" asked Mrs. Maitland. "Lilian should compose them entirely, I think. And yet I am wrong, for I doubt if either of you could do anything without the other."

The twins smiled, knowing this to be perfectly true. They were alike, and yet different. Lilian's features were fuller than Cyril's; her eyes softer and of a grey colour, but they met the gazer with an even more powerful electric thrill than Cyril's light blue orbs; her hair was many shades lighter than her brother's; and while Cyril could not appear in any assembly without exciting interest and drawing all eyes to himself, Lilian had a peculiar manner of pervading places without attracting the slightest observation. Gradually one became aware of an influence, and only after a long time discovered the personage from whom it emanated.

No one ever praised Lilian's beauty, though she possessed all the elements of loveliness. She shared Cyril's musical voice, but lacked its more powerful and penetrating tones. Cyril had beautifully shaped hands, but Lilian's were like two fair spirits, and formed the only striking part of her personality; they were the first thing the stranger observed in her, and, once observed, they were never for a moment forgotten. The twins had shared everything from their babyhood. The same tutor demanded equal tasks of brother and sister; and when Cambridge separated them, Lilian still followed the course of her brother's studies, and would doubtless have been a high wrangler, had she been submitted to the same tests as he. The peculiar bond between them was respected and acknowledged even by Mark Antony, who was, as his mistress frequently observed, a cat of considerable force of character. Besides Lilian, Cyril was the only human being Mark Antony ever followed or fawned upon, and it was supposed

that his very strong affections were entirely bestowed upon the twins.

To strangers this cat was haughtily indifferent; and, if a visitor took such a liberty as to stroke his ebon fur, would rise and walk away with offended majesty. To the family he observed a distant but eminently courteous demeanour; to the servants he was condescending; to the children polite, but never familiar, their respectful caresses being received with dignified resignation, and never suffered to go beyond a certain point; his bearing to the dogs was that of a despot. He was a great warrior, and suffered no other cat to intrude so much as a paw on the Rectory grounds; hence his name.

He never left Lilian while she was in the house, and at certain seasons exacted games of play from her, scorning to play with any one else, save occasionally when he unbent so far as to entangle himself wildly in Winnie's curls, to the great consternation of the dogs. But Cyril might do anything with him, and could never do wrong. In this, Mark Antony differed from his mistress, since Cyril was the only person with whom she ever quarrelled, the two having had many a pitched battle in their childhood, though they always stood up for each other to such an extent that, if one was punished by the deprivation of pudding, the other was permitted to go on half rations with the delinquent, and to give one an orange meant to give each half a one.

"Did you tell him that the Everards were here this afternoon?" Mrs. Maitland added, the personal pronoun being considered sufficient indication to Lilian of her brother, while "her" in addressing Cyril was known to mean Lilian.

"Were they, indeed? and I away, of course," grumbled Cyril.

"You may guess Marion's message," laughed Lilian, in a low aside, at which Cyril looked pleased.

"Well, mother, and the news?" he added.

"Henry's long silence is satisfactorily explained."

"Satisfactorily? Oh, mother! and he has been at death's door!" interrupted Lilian.

"Ill? Everard? I knew there must be something very serious," ejaculated Cyril. "But he is better?"

"He is convalescent, dear. He is a noble, unselfish fellow, as I always knew when he was but a tiny boy! He would not let his friends be written to until he was completely out of danger. There was a child dangerously ill of scarlet fever in some dreadful court in Seven Dials. He was too ill to be moved, and had a bad, drunken mother, and Henry watched him for several nights, relieving guard with a day nurse. By the time the child was out of danger Henry was raving——"

"Then, why," interrupted Cyril, with agitation, "were we not told?"

"He had foreseen his delirium, and forbidden any communication till he died or recovered. He knew full well that nothing would have kept Marion from him, had she known——"

"He was right!" broke in Cyril, in a low, fervid tone. "Thank Heaven that he thought of that!"

"Henry always thinks of everything that may affect the welfare of his friends," added Lilian, whose face wore a look of quiet enthusiasm, and whose dark grey eyes were shining with repressed tears.

"And now?" added Cyril, with energy. "They will not let Marion go to him now, I hope. The convalescent stage is the most infectious."

"They will not meet until Henry is perfectly free from infection. You may trust Henry for that, Cyril."

"He has been very ill," said Lilian; "they feared he would be both blind and deaf. It will be months before he can recover, though the infectious stage is already nearly past."

"Poor old Everard! that will be a terrible trial for him, with his ambition. Time is so precious to a man who is beginning his career."

"I suspect he has been working too hard," said Mrs. Maitland, "and the enforced rest to his brain may benefit him more than they think. Admiral Everard is ordered to the Mediterranean with the squadron in a few weeks' time, and, a winter abroad being necessary for Henry, he is to go in the *Cressy* to Malta, from whence he will afterwards go to other places—Egypt and the Holy Land among them—and Marion is to be his companion."

"Marion? What! Marion spend the winter abroad? Impossible! She shall not go."

"You are not married yet, Cyril," said Lilian, laughing.

"My dear boy, why should Marion not go?" asked his mother, in surprise. "She is delighted at the prospect. It is perhaps the only chance she will have of going abroad for any length of time. Once married, a girl cannot see much of the world, as the admiral says, and a country curate's wife is especially bound to home."

"And do you suppose, mother, that I shall always be a country curate?" asked Cyril, with fire. "No, indeed. My wife will have as many opportunities of seeing the world as any one, I trust. But she cannot, she must not leave me all this winter. I simply cannot spare her."

"And Henry—can he spare her?" asked Lilian.

"She is not engaged to Henry. Let Henry get a wife of his own."

"My dear Cyril, how absurdly you talk!" said Mrs. Maitland. "You forget that Henry is an invalid, and will need his sister's care. And you forget, too, that Marion is looking forward with the greatest delight to this unexpected trip."

"The only lady on board—on board a man-of-war!"

"And awful fun, too," interposed the boy on the rug. "I only wish I was ill, and the admiral would take me."

"Well, Lennie, you would be a more appropriate passenger, certainly. The admiral had better take us all, I think. Snip, the terrier, and Snap, the pug, with Mark Antony to catch the mice and keep us in order."

"But Marion is not going in the *Cressy*," interposed Lilian. "There was some idea of her going at first. It seems, however, that ladies are not supposed to sail with their relations."

"I was beginning to wonder whether the admiral purposed carrying a regular Noah's ark about with him," grumbled Cyril. "And pray, how does Marion get to Malta, unless in the *Cressy*? By balloon? or does she charter a vessel of her own?"

"She goes with the Wilmots, overland by Marseilles. Captain Wilmot is joining his regiment at Malta. They stop at Paris and other places, taking it leisurely, and that will be delightful to Marion, who has travelled so little."

"It seems, then, after all, that Henry will have to do without Marion till he reaches Malta," said Cyril.

"But he will have his father, and, of course, a proper attendant on board. At Malta he will be thrown on his own resources, and will need a companion. They will take care of each other," Mrs. Maitland replied cheerfully. "They think of coming home by way of Sicily."

"I shall go to Woodlands to-morrow, and remonstrate with the admiral, if he is there. I shall take the pony-chaise, unless you want it, Lilian."

"Nonsense, Cyll. You may go to the Woodlands and take the pony, but you will not remonstrate with the admiral, or make yourself in any way obnoxious," said Lilian. "When you come to reflect, you will see what a charming arrangement it is for everybody. The admiral is the more delighted, as he thinks this voyage will make Henry so desperately in love with the navy that he will become a naval surgeon."

"Hang the admiral!" observed Cyril, in his softest, most plaintive voice, while a droll little smile curved his lips. "Why doesn't somebody pity me? Isn't it hard lines, Mark Antony?"

Mark Antony responded by a tiny mew. He was sitting on the writing-table between his twin favourites, the picture of feline bliss; his tail curled round his dainty white paws, his snowy breast tinted by the ruddy firelight, his eyes lazily closing and unclosing, while he made rhythmic accompaniment to their voices in deep, long-drawn purrs, and expressed a benevolent and condescending interest in the conversation by occasional winks and movements in the direction of brother or sister, as each spoke. He had inspected and thoroughly sniffed Cyril's sermon with an air of approving criticism.

"Mark Antony was most condescending to Marion this afternoon," said Lilian; "he not only purred affably when she stroked him, but even allowed her to kiss him on the breast."

Whereupon Cyril bestowed a salute on the same spot, commending the cat's sagacity in thus recognizing Marion as one of the family. Mark Antony drew himself up with gratified pride, and returned his friend's caress by lifting his velvet paw, placing his head on one side with an arch, roguish expression in his sparkling eyes and bristled white whiskers, and chucking Cyril under the chin with the daintiest grace, to the envy and delight of the children, who worshipped this household divinity at a distance; the jealous disgust of the dogs, who were sleeping with one eye open, after the manner of their tribe, and growled faintly; and the admiration of the whole family, who knew that this delicate caress was never accorded save to the twins.

"No one seems to have thought of me in this matter," observed Cyril, stroking the delighted animal. "I shall certainly stand up for my rights. This notion of sacrificing Marion, and sending her half the world over in charge of an invalid brother, is too detestable. Her sisters should interfere; they stand in the place of a mother to her."

"Married sisters have little influence on home affairs, fortunately for Marion's freedom in the choice of a husband," Mrs. Maitland said, laughing.

"Well, it grows late," said Cyril, rising. "By the way, I did your errands at Lee's. The eggs and the pupil are to arrive tomorrow morning."

"I am so glad you remembered," replied Lilian. "I have the greatest desire to gain some influence over Alma Lee. Do you know, Cyril, she is a girl of no common character. No one in the least suspects what that girl is capable of."

"What, Lill, have you unearthed another genius?" asked Cyril, carelessly.

"Oh no; no genius. But the next time you see her, observe

the way in which her eye flashes, and the mobility of her features. Poor Alma! she is so liable to fall into temptation, with her beauty and ignorance, and passionate, undisciplined nature. There are fine elements in her, deep feeling, strong imagination, and capability of self-sacrifice. How she tended that poor little step-sister of hers! Lucy was fearfully afflicted. Her own mother shrank from her at times; but Alma, never. Yet she is very way ward, and so spoilt. Her nature is powerful for evil and good. Nothing but strong principle can keep such a nature straight."

Cyril listened, looking thoughtfully towards the fire, with his hand shading his eyes from its light.

"My sister is a profound student of human nature, mother," he observed lightly. "She is right in saying that Miss Alma has a will of her own. Let us hope you will succeed in putting a curb on this unbridled nature, Lilian. You are quite right in your analysis of it. But I am not sure that a Bible-class is the panacea you imagine. To move Alma Lee, I think you must appeal to her affections."

"She is frightfully vain, poor girl!" interposed Mrs. Maitland. "If you could induce her to dress more quietly, Lilian!"

"I am not so much afraid of her vanity, mother. As Cyril says, her affections must be got at, and I want to make my Bible-class a means to that end."

"Just listen to the parish priest!" laughed Cyril; "she talks like a book. She is worth ten curates to my father. The time I have wasted, as usual; it is past seven! Good night, Lennie. Have you earned the half-crown yet? No? Lazy fellow. You will never be able to own a menagerie as you wish, unless you work harder. You may still get the half-crown if you bring me a fable of La Fontaine's, in decent Latin, remember. Winnie has fully earned hers, and here it is, brand-new. Good night, mother. Father will be home at eight, he bid me tell you. Good night, Lilian." And, having been duly taken leave of by the dogs, Cyril left the drawing-room, accompanied to the door by Lilian and Mark Antony, the latter flourishing his tail aloft with due ceremony, and remaining seated on the step at Lilian's feet, watching till the young man's form was swallowed up in the wintry gloom.

"Cyril appears anxious to be married," Mrs. Maitland observed, on Lilian's return to the drawing-room. "It is a very strong attachment, and well placed, fortunately for the dear boy. His anxiety about Marion actually made him forget Henry's peril, and the heroism which brought it upon him. Love is stronger than friendship."

"Cyril is very impulsive," replied Lilian, "and, like all impul-

sive people, is in a desperate hurry about everything. An early marriage is the thing to give balance to such a temperament."

"Dear child," remonstrated her mother, "I do not think he needs balance. I may be a foolish old woman," she added, smiling, "but I can see no fault in Cyril. Neither can your father. I wish he had wider scope for his fine talents. To cramp a young fellow of his splendid powers and attainments in that narrow country parish seems such a deplorable waste of good material. I see, too, that the bondage chafes him."

Lilian made no reply, but looked thoughtfully at the fire, soothing some inward perturbation by stroking and restroking Mark Antony, who sat purring with an expression of imbecile rapture on her knee.

Cyril meanwhile made his way through the foggy darkness of the country roads to his rooms in the tiny village where lay his cure, vexed and cogitating upon every possible means of keeping Marion in England.

His dinner was ready—a simple chop, but cooked and served in the daintiest perfection, and accompanied by a bottle of claret of a delicate vintage. Some late flowers and a dish of autumn fruit garnished his table, all the appointments of which were elegant and refined. Nothing in the simple little lattice-windowed room could offend the most fastidious taste, though it was rather bare, and its easiest chair would have been full of penance to some people's limbs. Two proof line-engravings, after Raphael, were its sole adornments, unless we include a great many books, most of which were well bound, and a harmonium. His solitary meal ended, Cyril's landlady brought him some coffee, made as English coffee rarely is, and served in a lovely cup of Sèvres, the gift of Marion Everard, and acquainted him with the fact that an old woman had sent three times that day, requesting him to come and read to her, as she was taken worse.

"I'll go directly," replied Cyril. "Poor old soul! I'm so sorry I was out when she sent;" and he started from his seat to get his hat. Then it struck him that he had better drink the coffee while it was hot, and he sat down again, and fell into a reverie, experiencing the delicious physical languor which comes after much air and exercise and the satisfaction of a temperate appetite, and which is so favourable to a certain kind of mental occupation. He looked wistfully at a volume of St. Augustine, which lay ready to his hand, and then at his watch. "It is too late for Martha Hale to-night," he reflected; "and, after all, what good can I do her? Her life has been a combination of a martyr's and a saint's; she has the Bible at her fingers' ends, and

caught me tripping in a quotation twice the other day. Her spiritual knowledge is such as I can only dimly guess at. I can tell her nothing that she does not know five times as well as I. Her daughter reads to her by the hour. She has no sins to confess, no doubts to calm. And it would be a sin to disturb her at this time of night." And he finished the coffee, and was soon lost in St. Augustine's "City of God," which he closed at about the time when Martha Hale's radiant soul took flight from its worn and suffering tenement. Then he slept as youth sleeps, Marion's sweet face flitting through his dreams, and her voice making melody to an accompaniment of sweetly clashing peals of the bell-music from Long's waggon team.

CHAPTER IV.

RATHER more than a year after Alma Lee's evening ride in the waggon, a railway carriage containing two travellers was speeding southwards through the wintry air, with din and rattle and smoke, in the wake of the red-eyed engine, which panted, groaned, and throbbed as with the agony of some vexed demon.

The travellers were men in the heyday of youth, and their comfortable rugs, and the array of books and papers with which they were surrounded in the well-padded carriage, marked them as among those fortunate sons of earth who are absolved from the labour of carefully considering sixpences and shillings before converting them into things of convenience or pleasure. An odour as of a recently evanished cigar of fine flavour further emphasized their emancipation from the slavery of petty economies, though a practised observer would never for a moment have classed them in the ranks of those gilded youth who are exempted from the curse of labour and at liberty to squander the rich prime of their strength on pleasures and follies as they will. No; they were evidently two young men of the cultured middle class, bred in comfort, if not luxury, but with their own standing yet to make—a truly happy position for youth of average thews and sinews.

They sat in opposite corners, with their legs stretched out beneath their warm rugs, one looking backwards at the swiftly receding perspective of trees and fields, villages and farmsteads, flashing and fading on the sight; the other facing forwards to the yet unseen, but seeing it not, since he was fast asleep. Fast

asleep, unconscious and peaceful as any babe on its mother's breast, he was speeding on without fear to a fate which in his wildest dreams he could never have pictured, and which, could it have been shadowed forth ever so dimly to him, he would have dismissed with laughing scorn as utterly improbable—nay, impossible. Yet the train rushed on with pant and puff and clatter, bearing him nearer and nearer to the hidden terror with every quiet breath he drew in his secure slumbers, while pleasant fancies of the present and warm hopes of the future wove themselves into fantastic images in his light dreams. His was a well-built, manly form, and his sleeping face, with all its placid calm, was full of latent energy and bright intellect; a strong, serene face, with firm lips and chin, the face of a man who could do and endure much; a face expressive of healthy vigour of both mind and body, though it bore traces of fatigue, which the soft touches of sleep were every moment erasing.

His wakeful companion was a clergyman, a man whose mobile and finely cut features, and eyes full of intense blue light, were expressive of something akin to genius; a man whose delicately organized nature could be touched, the observer would imagine, only to the finest issues.

A world of thought and care sat on the young priest's brow, and the look which he bent on the fast-receding fields was so profoundly sad, that it would seem as if happiness could never again smile on him. None of the layman's calm strength and wholesome serenity was his; such power as his face expressed would come in lightning flashes of brief but keen intensity. All nerve, fire, imagination, and feeling, was this young spirit apparently; capable of descending to the lowest depths of suffering, or rising to the very airiest summits of enthusiasm. It was an eminently beautiful and spiritual young face, and one which never failed to awaken interest, if not love. He looked very worn and fatigued; but no merciful wing of sleep came to fan the trouble from his brow, while his companion slept so serenely and dreamed so pleasantly.

In one hand he held a little book with red edges; but, instead of consulting its pages, his eyes were bent fixedly on the flying wintry landscape, which, nevertheless, they saw not, their gaze of intense abstraction being turned inwards upon some unspeakable sorrow. His face was in the shadow, while some rays of wintry sunlight fell upon the sleeper's face, touched the brown moustache with tints of gold, and finally dazzled the closed eyes to wakefulness. They were very pleasant eyes when opened—honest, hazel eyes, looking directly and kindly upon the world, and

suggesting the sunshine of wholesome mirth in their depths; shrewd eyes, for they had seen many varieties of human beings in the course of six and twenty years, and were not easily deceived.

"Upon my word," observed the owner of the eyes, "I think I must have forgotten myself for a moment, Cyril."

At the first sound of his voice all the sadness vanished from the young priest's face; the mournfully brooding eyes left the landscape, and flashed a gay brilliance upon the face in the sunshine; the finely moulded lips lost their drooping curve in a smile; the dejected attitude became one of alert repose; the whole man was changed.

"You may have forgotten yourself, old fellow, but it was impossible for any one else to forget you with that dulcet harmony of yours resounding through the brain," he replied.

"Come, now, that's a libel; I never snore," returned the other, with a hearty yawn that brought the tears into his eyes; "and if I did, you might forgive me, since you were not preaching."

"There are some sermons of mine just over your head, Everard; who knows but some lulling influence may have emanated from them?"

"'He jests at scars that never felt a wound.' You scoundrel, you know very well that the sleep of the just is murdered the moment you begin thumping the pulpit-cushion," said Everard, with a banter which veiled an honest enthusiasm for his friend's gifts.

"I suppose I ought to say something neat with regard to the elegance with which you take off people's legs and tie up their arteries. But, you see, my ignorance is so total——"

"Exactly. Genius in our profession is known only to the initiated, while in yours it is impossible to hide its light under a bushel. Lucky fellows, you parsons. Not the minutest spark of worth in you escapes observation."

"You have hit on the weak point in our profession, Henry," said Cyril, dropping his air of banter. "Seriously, it is a very awful thing to be placed as we are in the full light of public observation, all our weaknesses, failings, and errors heightened by its glare, and doing—oh, the smallest of them!—such worlds and worlds of harm."

"Stuff, Maitland! That is where you parsons err. You think too much of your example and influence. You don't suppose, man, that we think you superior to human weaknesses? Not a bit of it; we should loathe you, if we did. For goodness' sake, Cyril, don't take up with these superfine priestly notions. By the way, why didn't you go to sleep? You look as if you wanted it

badly enough. Have you got some infernal machine secreted under your waistcoat, to wake you with a timely dig in case you succumb to nature's weakness, according to the rule of St. What's-his-name?"

"My dear fellow," returned the other, with a pained look, "you mean no harm, but you handle certain subjects with a levity——"

"Come now, Cyril, we are not treading on holy ground. Your conscience and feelings are in a state of hyper-æsthesia; you have been working too hard. I didn't mean that parsons were not expected to practise what they preach a little more precisely than other men, or that any grave lapse on their part is not worse in them than in others. But I object to this morbid self-consciousness and conscience-searching. Surely a clergyman who is honest in his faith ought to be able to lead a Christian's life with sufficient ease to prevent him from torturing himself about the effect of his peccadilloes, which are all taken for granted, on his flock."

"There are no peccadilloes for us," returned Cyril, with a deep sigh. "But now, Henry, let me speak out my anxiety about you as a friend merely, not as a priest. Many things you have said lately have grieved me deeply——"

"Oh, I know! Because I don't believe in the devil, I am in a parlous state. You priests have a great tenderness for that absurd old devil of yours. Beg his pardon; I will speak more respectfully of him in future. Drive on."

"Your profession," pursued Maitland, with a look of shocked forbearance, "is a noble one; nay, in some respects it is more noble than the priesthood itself, though lacking the special stamp of sanctity which that bears. It is more noble because it involves so much more self-sacrifice. But it is one beset with special and awful dangers. Your minds are so constantly set upon the material, that it is no wonder if you are tempted to lose sight of the spiritual."

"That I admit," returned Everard.

"You risk your souls that you may heal our bodies, and the Italian proverb, 'Where there are three doctors there are two atheists,' is daily verified."

"Granted. But I am not one of the atheists, happily for me."

"Not yet; but I tremble for you, Henry. That light tone grows upon you. And you reason every day more and more from the point of view of the man of science. You learn more and more to distrust everything that cannot be proved by the evidence of the senses——"

"Of reason."

"It amounts to the same thing. Will you promise to pray against this, Henry?" asked Cyril, with intense supplication.

"My friend," returned the other, with a slight shake of his body, like that a dog gives in issuing from the water, "you accused me just now of treating sacred things with levity. Now your words jar upon my sense of reverence, which is strangely different in a priest and a layman. You are accustomed, you see, to handle religious topics freely. I am not. And as I have no words to express them in, I would rather leave them alone."

Cyril heaved a profound sigh, and was silent for some seconds, while Everard kindled a second cigar.

"You think I have taken a liberty, Harry?" he asked, after a while.

"Not in the least. Feeling as you do, you would have been wrong to be silent. You have but done your duty, old friend. Cheer up. Oh, do keep a fellow company in a cigar! It is holiday-time."

Cyril's sensitive face brightened. It was evident that he was extremely anxious about the effect his words would have on his friend's estimation of him. But he resolutely declined the cigar—a self-denial which fretted his friend as being quite a new feature in his character.

"You are very much changed, Maitland, during the past year," he said, looking keenly at him.

"I am indeed," he replied, with a heavy sigh; and he turned the subject by pointing out the towers of a grey cathedral in the distance. "It is always a pleasant friend to meet on one's way home," he said; and the two joined in admiring the massive pile, till their passage through a chalk cutting hid it from their sight for a time, and then the train slackened, the shouts of porters were heard, the cathedral appeared once more, and they glided under the roofs of the smoky station, amid a confused din of bell-ringing, door-banging, hurrying steps and wheels, and all the turmoil attending a brief pause on a main line.

"Belminster always had a great fascination for me," observed the doctor, looking across the sea of smoke-wreathed roofs to the east towers of the cathedral. "Surely that serenely majestic person in gaiters is the bishop himself. The expression 'Church dignitary' is so fit. Who ever heard of a medical dignitary, or a legal dignitary? Good gracious me, Maitland, what an awful thing it must be to be a bishop's son! Fancy asking that urbane and dignified cleric to pass the wine! I should faint if called upon to feel a spiritual lordship's pulse."

Cyril smiled as the unconscious bishop made a stately and solitary progress past their carriage, recognizing the young clergyman as he passed.

"He is very kind and fatherly," he observed, as the train moved on. "I wish I were still in his diocese. Yes, I have a great regard for Belminster. I was ordained there."

"May you walk in the gaiters of that good old gentleman, Cyril, some score of years hence, and make the splendid old arches of the minster ring with your eloquence! I shall settle near you—as parish doctor, mind—though I invent heaven knows how many diseases, as I hope to do, and Europe rings with my discoveries. No fashionable physician business for me."

"A bishop," observed the young priest, thoughtfully, "has an immense scope for action."

"Here is a man," said Everard, appealing to the windows and sides of the carriage, "who is too honest to say, 'Nolo episcopari.' Let us make much of this man! Let us—hem!—marry him to our sister."

"This day two months," added Maitland, "the wedding will take place."

"By the way, the young minx suggested that I should read Tennyson's 'St. Simeon Stylites' at the next Penny Readings. The suggestion is, I suppose, intended for a profound joke. Rather a weak poem. Lunacy requires the master-mind of a Shakespeare to handle it without repulsiveness."

"I am not sure that it *was* lunacy," said Cyril.

"Not lunacy to stand on a pillar for thirty years? My good fellow, when I consider the doings of the Stylites and the recluses of the Thebaïd, I sometimes wonder if there was any sanity in the world in those days."

"There was, at least, method in their madness, Everard. Consider the power their austerities gained them over the minds of ordinary men."

"Of course; many an authentic maniac has been honoured with almost divine honours in certain stages of society. The lust of power is a curious thing. For my part, I would rather be a nonentity than stand on a pillar to gain influence."

"But consider what they wanted influence for. To bring souls to God."

"So they persuaded themselves, no doubt. Of all things, I loathe asceticism. Not so much for the spiritual ambition and pride that attend it, as because it is in reality only the other side of profligacy, or, in other words, an ascetic is a rake turned monk."

"Can a rake do better than turn monk?"

"In my judgment, he can. He can repent, turn away from his wickedness, and lead a rational human life."

"Nay. He has made himself unworthy of those common human enjoyments in which innocent men may indulge. Nothing but a life of penance can atone——"

"Nothing can atone," interrupted Everard. "I am a Protestant, Cyril—a rabid Protestant, as you observed the other day. None of your popish penances for me. What's the matter?"

"Nothing," replied Cyril, whose features quivered with pain, as he pressed his hand to his side. "At least, only a 'stitch' I am subject to. Myself, I long for more austerity in the Christian life of to-day. A few eremites of the Thebaïd type n Salisbury Plain——"

"I tell you what, Cyril: you must learn to moderate your transports in that parish of yours, or you will soon be in a hospital or a lunatic asylum. Subject to a stitch at four and twenty! It won't do. The devil fly away with your eremites! There are legends of some of those same Thebaïd lunatics, who, after passing years and years in every species of austerity, suddenly burst their unnatural trammels in one unguarded moment, fled to the city, and plunged into a very vortex of iniquity. Extremes meet, and Nature is a stern avenger."

The spasm again flitted across Cyril's face, unnoticed by his friend, for Cyril turned to the window as he pressed his side. Beneath his clothes be wore a little golden cross, studded with tiny spikes, which, on pressure, pierced the flesh.

"The exception rather proves the rule," he said, smiling, as he turned his face again towards his friend. "The ascetics have in all ages of the world been the salt of the earth. A mere protest against sensuality is something. And people need the discipline of pain."

"If I were to invent a purgatory, Cyril, it would be one of happiness. Joy is the true educator and refiner, not pain. Nothing exists, or can exist, without joy, which is both the originator and sustainer of life in the organic world, and therefore, by analogy, in the spiritual. You and I are here to-day as the result of long ages of physical and moral well-being enjoyed through an infinite chain of ancestors. Without continued physical, mental, and moral enjoyment throughout our own individual lives, you and I would never have attained to our present physical, mental, and moral stature—such as it is. Good heavens, Cyril! think of the stunted, stifled natures we have been seeing daily in those dens of East-End vice and misery, and contrast them with the men who were our companions at Cambridge!"

"I grant a certain necessary basis of physical well-being," rejoined Cyril, wearily; "but I trust the day will dawn when you too will rejoice in the discipline of sorrow. It may even now be knocking at your doors; for you are too happy, Harry, for a sinful man——"

"I am most perfectly happy, and trust to remain so, my gruesome prophet," said Everard, with a cheery laugh. "I have youth, health, a clear conscience, a profession I love, and good prospects in it, and—and——" Here a curious smile, and something distantly resembling a blush, irradiated the doctor's face. "In short, I should be an ungrateful miscreant if I were not perfectly happy. Though, to be sure," he added, "I am not going to be married to one of the dearest girls on earth this day two months. Why, what is this? Oldport already, as I am a living man!" He was on his feet in a moment, eagerly scanning the faces on the platform, while Cyril collected the various *impedimenta*. "She is not there," he muttered, in a tone of disappointment, as he appropriated his own share of the plunder.

"Oh no!" returned Cyril, in a composed manner; "she had no intention of coming. Lilian would come alone; the phaeton only holds three, and Marion, of course, would not drive in alone."

Everard smiled at the different significance of the word "she" in his own and his friend's vocabulary: to the latter it meant Marion; to himself, Lilian.

"Perhaps she *is* here, after all," he continued, "waiting outside with the pony."

"Go and see," said Cyril; "time and patience, meanwhile, may result in the production of a porter, which event I will abide."

Everard eagerly strode along the little platform, thronged with labourers and market-women bearing baskets of the singularly aggressive nature affected by market-women—baskets constructed apparently for the express purpose of damaging passengers' ribs, and finding out their tenderest spots. He threaded his way eagerly through these perils, occasionally removing a stolid and motionless human obstacle by the simple process of placing his hands on its shoulders and wheeling it aside, till he issued on the top of the hill outside the station. The river flowed peacefully by its wharves at the foot of the hill; the little town rose on its banks, and clustered lovingly round the base of the tall white tower, whose weathercock burned golden in the clear wintry sky; and the grey downs laid their arms protectingly round this, their child.

But Everard did not look at this scene; he scanned only the lines of flys and omnibuses, each manned by a gesticulating, whip-

waving driver, in search of the well-known pony from Malbourne, with the face he loved behind it. But there was no pony and no Lilian, and he returned disconsolate to Cyril, who, in the mean time, had succeeded in gaining the attention of one of the two distracted porters.

"Perhaps," observed Cyril, tranquilly, "I forgot to write. Who knows? Well, we must have a fly."

"By the sword of my grandfather," cried Everard, "I will not go in one of those confounded flys. Let us walk. The weather is made for it. A country walk will drive ascetic megrims out of your brain."

"And the portmanteaus?"

"Left till called for. We can carry our own bags. Now, look here," he added, as Cyril demurred, "I am not going to mortify my flesh by riding in a cushioned fly behind two horses, with my luggage carried for me. I shall walk across country, bag on shoulder; and if that is too comfortable for your reverence, you can get some dried peas at the first grocer's we come to."

Cyril laughed and consented. Everard gave the man silver to buy peas to put in his boots, to his great mystification, and the two young men set off down the hill, deafened by the importunities of flymen and crossed the bridge over the dark, sluggish river, and admired the artistic pyramids of casks on the brewers' wharves, and rejoiced at hearing the familiar Hampshire drawl in the streets; for it was market-day, and many a rustic lounged, stolid, with open mouth, before the gay shop-windows decked for Christmas.

Presently a more musical sound made their ears tingle with pleasant home-thoughts—the sweet, melodious confusion of waggon-bells, clashing rhythmically along the street, and they soon recognized Long's fine team of horses, each proudly shaking the music from his crest, and responding to the guttural commands of William Grove, who strode along with an expressionless face and a sprig of mistletoe in his cap, cracking his whip, and accompanied by his satellite Jem, who bore holly in his hat. A faint gleam, distantly resembling a smile, spread over William's face at the greeting of the two young men, and he even went so far as to issue the strange monosyllable which brought his team to a standstill at their request, while the more youthful and impassioned Jem expanded into a distinct grin, and replied that his health was "middling."

"Well, and how are all the Malbourne folk? and are any of our people in Oldport to-day, Grove?"

"I ain't zeed none as I knows on," he replied, after profound consideration.

"Any of the Malbourne folk 'gone up the steps' to-day?" asked Everard, looking in the direction of the town hall, which was closed, with its clock glittering in the sunshine.

"Ah! 'tain't often we goos up steps," returned William, who knew well that the steps referred to were those conducting the malefactor before the magistrates at the town hall, and which were numerous and unpleasant to climb with a burdened conscience. "We never knows, though," he added, in an unusual burst of moralizing, "who med be the next."

"I hope it won't be you, William," returned Everard; "if it is, it won't be for robbing those fine horses of their corn. Why, they look as fit as filberts," he added, patting the leader.

"It wun't be you neither, doctor," growled William, affectionately; "for all they zes as how you done for Jem Martin, a-cutting of him open and a-zewing of him up so many times, and pretty nigh pisened Mam Lee."

"Do they say that?" laughed Everard. "And this is fame, as Mr. Crummles observed, Cyril. Well, look here, William! you take these bags of ours, if you think the waggon can stand it, and fetch our portmanteaus from the station. Jem can run up the hill for them."

"Our luggage, William," explained Cyril, "if it won't put you out of your way. We are going home on foot, and didn't know how on earth to get our things out till we met you."

After deep cogitation, and some assistance from the quicker intelligence of Jem, the nature of the service he was required to render at last dawned upon William Grove's intellect, which was apparently situated at a long distance from the material world, and he consented with gruff heartiness, and, waking all the five little peals of music with one motion of his whip, started off in the direction of the station.

"A happy New Year to you!" the two friends cried together at parting.

"And beware of going up the steps," added Everard. "Upon my word, Cyril, I should like to explore the recesses of that fellow's moral consciousness. He is apparently up to the level of the most advanced thinkers of the day. He evidently looks upon crime as a misfortune dependent upon quite extrinsic circumstances."

"They all do," returned Cyril. "It is the part of Christianity to convince the world of sin."

"Who shall say how far a man's will consents to his acts?" added Everard, musingly. "I hope some day to be able to

give myself to the study of mental disease, and more accurately trace the connection between that and crime."

"Let us forget both this one day," said Cyril, whose spirits had undergone a wonderful change in the last half-hour, and were now gay even to boyishness.

Everard fell readily into his humour, and, chatting and laughing, the friends soon passed the streets of the little town and its miniature suburbs, and gained the pretty village of Chalkburne, the hoary tower of which showed in the sunlight fresh and unworn by its six centuries of storm, and greeted the travellers with the music of its chiming hour as they walked through the linden-girdled churchyard, rejoicing in their youth and the live wintry air.

Cyril had the gift of conversation, which Everard somewhat lacked, and the talk was brilliant and sparkled with his ready wit and quick repartee, in which the doctor was continually worsted, greatly to his own good-humoured content. His love for Cyril and his admiration for his gifts were boundless. The two friends had passed all their school-time together, Everard riding daily to Malbourne to study with Cyril's tutor, Mr. Maitland's curate; and in those young days the hero-worship began, the elder boy, whose mental powers were slower, if more solid, admiring, protecting, and helping the bright-eyed, clever child who shared his studies and so often distanced him. They met again at Cambridge, where the senior was only one year ahead of his two-years junior, and there Everard found fresh cause to admire his brilliant and successful friend, who gathered friends and admirers innumerable about him, and won laurels, both literary and social.

And now family ties promised to unite them more closely, and Everard was glad—far more glad than Maitland, whose affection for his friend, though warm, had not the slightest element of hero-worship, but was, on the contrary, flavoured with a good spice of condescension. With all his imagination and quick sympathy, Cyril did not see that Henry possessed those solid and patient mental gifts which readily master the facts of physical science, and, above all, had the peculiar faculty which may be called scientific imagination,—that he was, in short, one of those chosen few who make new epochs in the history of scientific research. Cyril looked upon his enthusiasm for his profession as praiseworthy, but inexplicable. It seemed to him that Henry crawled upon the earth, while he soared in the vast of heaven's blue. Such was the bond which united the two hard-working young men who walked along the chalky road that bracing afternoon at the end of December, to pass a week's well-earned holiday under the friendly roof of Malbourne Rectory.

CHAPTER V.

THE afternoon sun was shining peacefully upon the thatched roofs of Malbourne, on the dark grey spire of its tree-girdled church, and on the south-west front of Malbourne Rectory. At one of the sun-lighted windows sat Lilian Maitland, busily writing, her face directed to the prospect without, which she occasionally looked upon in her thoughtful pauses.

The lawn sloped quickly from the windows to a road which was concealed by trees, and beyond which rose the park-like grounds of Northover House in such a manner as to appear but a continuation of the Rectory grounds. Somewhere down in the hollow by the road there danced and murmured the bright little stream which gave its name to Malbourne, and which Lilian knew was sparkling gaily now in the sunshine, as it washed the drooping hart's-tongue waving from its mossy bank. Beyond the cluster of village roofs on the right spread a range of flat, windy fields to the unseen sea. Behind the Rectory, and on the left of Lilian's window, rose the bleak chalk downs, strong barriers against the wild salt winds which swept over those regions, summer and winter, from the sea.

Mark Antony, the cat, sat demurely on the table by the blotting-book, thoughtfully scanning the sunny landscape, and pretending not to see the pert little robin on the lawn, while he occasionally appealed to Lilian's sympathies by rubbing his velvet head against her cheek, or giving her a dainty little bite, which he had copied from his human friends, under the impression that it was a kiss. In a low chair, between the table and the fire, sat a very pretty, slender girl, toying with a piece of fancy work, but really intent upon trying to win a glance or responsive purr from Mark Antony, who regarded all her efforts with haughty indifference, and continued to evolve his philosophy of the visible universe unmoved.

"He is so tantalizing!" she cried, throwing away her work with a pretty pettish gesture. "If he would only once show some deference to me, I should not care. Puss, puss, I say! Come to me at once, sir!"

"He thoroughly understands the secret of his own supremacy, Marion," replied Lilian, coming to the end of her writing, and softly stroking the animal's snow-white breast. "He knows as well as you do that you would think nothing of his caresses if he lavished them unasked."

"Selfish, hateful animal!"

"He is not selfish," replied Lilian; "he is a profound student of human nature. He has discovered that the deepest joy a human being can taste is to love disinterestedly. He therefore offers mankind this enjoyment by permitting them to adore him at a distance. Dogs afford a far lower enjoyment—that of being loved."

"Dogs are right," said Marion, her brown eyes softening in a wistful gaze; "the happiest thing is to be loved. I should die if people didn't love me. I almost hated Cyril when I thought, in that dreadful time last spring, that he didn't care for me."

"It is delicious to be loved," rejoined Lilian, "but to love is best. How happy Henry is in his affection for you! You are the dearest thing in the world to him, and yet I think you care little comparatively for him; you even prefer your brother Leslie, who is always too busy with sport and gaieties to write to you."

"Well, it is different," replied Marion. "Henry is so full of learning that he seems older than Leslie, who is the darling of his regiment and so full of life. And then, Henry is not engaged. I am sure he has never cared for any girl, and will die an old bachelor. Of course, he cares much more for me than I can for him. And he is so devoted to Cyril."

"I think," said Lilian, pressing her cheek against her pet's glossy fur, "that neither of you know the real worth of Henry."

"Oh, he is the best old fellow in the world, but not clever and handsome like Cyril, and without the dash of Leslie. By the way, I suppose those bad boys will be here to-night."

"No doubt they will turn up some time, unless something serious detains them, in which case they will telegraph. Cyll has promised to preach to-morrow. Are you quite sure, Marion, that he did not mention his train? He always likes me to meet him at Oldport."

"He said he would write later to name the train. I suppose he forgot."

"He does forget now, Marion, as he never used to. He is killing himself in that dreadful parish. Oh, I shall be so thankful when you are married! There will be a perfect holiday, to begin with, and then you will keep him within reasonable bounds."

Marion laughed. "He will have to take care of me as well as the parish," she said. "But what is this?"

"This" proved to be merely Eliza, the parlour-maid, who entered with her usual unmoved countenance.

"It is only Stevens, Miss Lilian," she said. "And could you please step down to the forge at once?"

"The forge!" exclaimed Marion, with wide eyes of astonishment.

"What is the matter there, Eliza?" asked Lilian, tranquilly.

"Only Hotspur, Mr. Ingram's horse, miss. They've been trying this hour to get him shod. Straun says he wouldn't touch him for a hundred pounds."

"But what has the parish clerk to do with shoeing horses?" exclaimed the bewildered Marion.

"Or the parson's daughter?" added Lilian, laughing. "Why, nothing is done in the village without Stevens, Marion. He and Grandfer together are the oracles of Malbourne. No, you shall not come with me; you would be frightened to death. Go and see if mother wants anything. She will be waking now."

"Oh, I say, Lilian!" cried a little voice, as Lennie burst in, rosy and excited, "do come along. Such larks! Hotspur has kicked a cart to atoms, and now he is letting fly in all directions, and is killing Judkins, and there's Stevens stamping at the back door, and the whole village with its hair on end."

"Hyperbole is Lennie's favourite figure," commented Lilian, going out into the hall, and taking her hat and jacket. "Run on, Lennie, and say I am just coming. Matter? Oh, my dearest Marion, nothing! Only that Ingram Swaynestone spoils his horses' tempers, and then is surprised that his servants can't manage them."

In another minute Lilian had passed with quick, light step and erect carriage down the drive, and along the village high-road, bordered with its little gardens, in which one or two belated autumn flowers still made a brave show against the wintry rigour. She went quickly, but without hurry, and found time on the way to give some directions about the church to the clerk—a lean, rugged figure, stooping slightly beneath the fardel of some fifty winters, and crowned with a shock of grizzled red hair, who walked and talked excitedly at her side.

Soon she saw the forge, from the black heart of which streamed a ruddy glow, looking lurid in contrast with the sunshine, and round which was grouped a dense little crowd of women and children, with a few men. Straun, the smith, a burly, grimy, bare-armed figure in a leathern apron, stood in an attitude of defiant despair, one strong hand grasping his great hammer, which he had flung on the anvil, and calling silently on Heaven to witness that he was ready to shoe Christian horses, however rampant, but not demons, hippogriffs, or any such uncanny monsters. Near him, looking rather pale, but resolute, as became one superior to the weaker emotions, an old, bent,

withered man, with shrewd grey eyes and pursed-up mouth, stood leaning forward on a stout oaken stick, and shook his head as one who despaired of finding virtue in these degenerate days in either man or beast.

"And I zays, as I zed afore," he repeated, emphasizing his words with the stick, which he dug into the ground with all the force of his two withered hands, "zend for Miss Lilian—zend for she!"

"Lard love 'ee, Granfer," observed a stout fellow in a smock-frock, who stood inside the forge in attendance on a couple of massive, glossy-coated cart-horses, who were cosily munching some hay dropped before them, and contemplating the proceedings lazily with their great soft winking eyes, "where's the use of a gal?"—a proposition received by Granfer and the assembled village with silent scorn.

The centre of the excited little crowd, which occasionally burst asunder and flew outwards with a wild mingling of women's and children's shrieks—for the men skurried off with a silent celerity that was all the more effectual—was a beautiful chesnut horse, not standing, according to the comfortable and decent wont of horses, on four firmly planted feet, but outraging people's belief in the stability of natural laws by rearing himself wildly and insecurely on his two hind legs, and dangling from his mouth in mid-air a miserable white-faced biped in sleeved waistcoat and gaiters, whose cap had fallen off, and whose damp hair streamed as wildly as Hotspur's own waving mane and quivering tail. Tired of this folly, with his ears laid back, his nostrils wide and red, and his eyes showing nothing but the whites, Hotspur would suddenly drop his victim to his native earth, and, plunging forwards on his other end, as if intent on turning a summerset, would throw his hind hoofs up towards the sky in a manner most alarming to those who enjoyed a near view of the proceedings; and then, wearying of this, he would dance round on all four legs at once in a manner utterly bewildering to contemplate.

"Why, Hotspur," cried Lilian, in her clear, mellow voice, as she stepped quickly through the crowd just as Hotspur dropped the unfortunate groom to the ground, and prepared to turn himself the other way up, "what is this, old fellow?" and she caught the rein from the groom's hand, pushing the latter gently away, and laid her slender, strong white hand firmly upon the quivering neck of the maddened, plunging horse. "Fie, Hotspur, fie!"

No one had observed Lilian's approach, and when she appeared, as if dropped from the skies in the groom's place, a

sudden quiet pervaded every human face and limb, the crowd fell back, and all looked on, save the sceptic with the cart-horses, with an air of tranquil expectancy; while Lilian, without a trace of anxiety or agitation, talked in caressing, reproving tones to the ill-conducted steed, whose limbs had quivered into some approach to quiet at the first touch of the slender, spirit-like hand on his neck.

But even Lilian's magic touch could not expel the demon of passion at once from the maddened creature. He still reared and plunged and danced, in a manner that led the spectators to give him plenty of room for his evolutions; but he became gradually quieter, until he stood as Providence intended horses to stand, on all four feet at once, and only betrayed the internal workings of his outraged feelings by the quivering of his limbs and body, the workings of his ears and eyes, and the redness of his wide nostrils, while Lilian's musical voice never ceased its low monologue of soothing and reproach, and her hand never left stroking and patting his shining neck and shoulders. At Hotspur's first backward rear, indeed, her hand left him perforce, and she only avoided being hoisted in mid-air like the luckless groom by giving him a long rein and stepping quickly back out of the way of his formidable fore-feet.

This was an ugly moment, and a woman in the crowd uttered an exclamation of dismay and turned pale at the sight of the girl beneath the rearing horse, though no one else betrayed the least emotion, not even the sceptic in the smock-frock, whose mouth was too widely opened in astonishment to leave room for his features to express any other feeling; but Hotspur, finding that Lilian did not balk him of his dance on his hind legs, soon desisted from that uncomfortable performance, and yielded, as his betters frequently did, gradually to the soothing charm of her voice and touch, until he became, figuratively speaking, clothed and in his right hand. She found fault with Hotspur's bit, and pointed out the undue tightness of his girths to Judkins, whose cheeks had now resumed their native ruddy hue; and when these defects were remedied, she led the horse a little way along the road and back again, and fed him with sugar and other dainties, till Hotspur's heart waxed so glad within him that he consented to stand like a lamb, while Straun, not without some misgiving in his bluff face, and a muttered reference to his wife and his seven children, fitted his new shoes on to his restive feet with what speed and dexterity he could muster.

"And I zed," observed Granfer, again striking his oaken staff emphatically on the ground, and looking round on the assembled

village as if for applause, "zed I, 'Zend for Miss Lilian—zend for she'!"

The crowd, in the mean time, had been augmented by the arrival of two other spectators, who were unobserved in the absorbing interest evoked by Hotspur and his conqueror. One was a tall, finely built man, somewhat past middle life, on a good, well-bred bay horse, which he rode and handled with perfect horsemanship. He stopped, in the first instance, to avoid riding over the village population; and in the second, to witness the curious little drama enacted in the wintry sunshine. He was soon joined by a grey-haired clergyman, of venerable aspect and refined features, who looked on with quiet interest.

"Upon my word, Maitland," said the equestrian, addressing the latter, "this is a new revelation of your daughter's powers. I was already aware that she soothed the troubles and quieted the consciences of the whole village, but I did not know that she undertook the blacksmith's labours as well."

"My daughter," replied Mr. Maitland, tranquilly, "has received a very singular gift from the Almighty. She can subdue any animal, tame or wild, by some mysterious virtue of touch, voice, or glance—perhaps of all three. Not a very lofty gift, perhaps, Sir Lionel, but one which is often very useful in a homely way."

"But surely, Maitland, you cannot approve of Lilian's rendering such dangerous services as these. Are you not afraid for her?"

"No; I have every confidence in her powers. And I do not like to make her nervous by suggesting danger. Perhaps one secret of her influence is her absolute fearlessness. Watch the expression of her eye. No; I like my child to render whatever service she is capable of to her fellow-creatures. Parents often err, I think, by interfering unnecessarily with their children's actions. Well, Lilian, and what was the matter?" he asked, as the crowd, perceiving them, fell back respectfully, with curtsies and cap-touchings. Judkins, receiving his four-footed charge from Lilian's hand, prepared to mount and ride away, not without warning from Lilian, and strict injunctions to eschew whipping and other irritations, and to quiet Hotspur's nerves by a good canter on the turf.

"Only a horse with a spoilt temper, father," she replied. "How do you do, Sir Lionel? Tell Mr. Swaynestone that I mean to scold him roundly about Hotspur. He is far too hot himself to be able to indulge in chestnut horses. And, indeed, I am not sure that he ought to have any horse at all."

"All this," said Sir Lionel, who had dismounted and taken off

his hat with graceful, old-fashioned courtesy, "I will faithfully do, though surely one word from yourself would have more effect than volumes I could say. Do your spells work only on the lower creation, Lilian?"

"I suppose so," returned Lilian, turning homewards in the reddening sunbeams, accompanied by the two gentlemen and the horse, which latter she patted to his great satisfaction. "My spells consist chiefly of sympathy and affection, and these are perfect with innocent animals and children, but only partial with sinful men."

"Ben Lee will never forgive you for inducing me to drive without bearing-reins," said Sir Lionel. "I wish you could have seen the sight, Maitland. Lee ignominiously dethroned, your daughter and myself on the box, Lilian handling the ribbons, and driving me up and down before the house without bearing-reins. Lee never drives out now without preparing for his last moment, poor fellow. I hope you will not help poachers, Lilian. I hear you can surround yourself with fifty pheasants at any moment in our woods."

"If I were to hurt anything, I think my power would be gone; and even if I did not love a thing I should have no power, for I have no influence on reptiles."

"And does Cyril, who is so like you, share your power?"

"As a child he did," interposed Mr. Maitland. "You remember the bull that killed Lee's father, Sir Lionel? Imagine my feelings on seeing the twins, then about six years old, stroking him, and trying to reach by jumping up to his terrific horns! Still, Cyril has an unusual influence over animals, though it becomes fainter. He has more power with human beings than his sister."

"Yet Lilian stopped that fellow who was beating his wife to death."

"And the whole village looking on and not lifting a finger—the cowards!" Lilian flashed out. "He fell down in sheer fright when I rushed at him. Come in, Sir Lionel, and have some tea," she added, as they reached the gates.

But Sir Lionel refused the tea, having still some distance to ride before dark.

"I am in Lady Swaynestone's service to-night," he said, "and she bid me ask you to come and counsel her about some distribution of coals or what not, when you have a spare moment. I wish you could also exorcise the demon of extravagance from that boy Ingram."

"She nearly scolds the poor fellow to death as it is," said Mr. Maitland. "We are expecting Henry Everard to-night."

"So I hear. A promising fellow, Sir Andrew Smithson tells me. He was both clever and kind in his treatment of Lee's wife last spring. As a lad, I thought him rather dull. However, we all pin our faith on Dr. Everard now at Swaynestone."

And bidding them farewell, Sir Lionel sprang like any youth to his saddle, and rode away at a canter, looking like a very prince, as his tall and gracefully erect figure disappeared among the trees in the dusk.

The group at the forge, meantime, rightly judged that so much heat, toil, and anxiety required the alleviation of moisture, and Straun, casting his hammer aside, proclaimed his intention of adjourning for solace to the Sun, which stood at the corner by the cross-roads, a few paces further down the road.

"Come on, Stevens," he said, "and toss me who'll treat Granfer."

The guardian of the cart-horses thought it a pity not to follow so good an example; so also did Hale, the wheelwright, who lived at the opposite corner; and Wax, who chanced to be the schoolmaster, and Baines, the tailor, whose monotonous indoor occupation, though varied with pig-jobbing and gardening, required frequent solace of this nature. Hale's brother Tom, a soldier resting from war's alarms in his native village in a very undress uniform, consisting of no belt, a tunic unbuttoned all the way down and displaying a large expanse of striped shirt, trousers tucked up round the ankles, a short pipe, and a muffin-cap perilously askew, considered it a breach of manners unbecoming a soldier and a gentleman to permit these worthy men to drink without his assistance; and similar feelings animated his brother Jim, a sailor, bearing the legend, "H.M.S. *Bellerophon*," on his cap. So the brave fellows, accommodating their pace to that of Granfer, which was more dignified than swift, turned in as one man beneath the low doorway of the Sun, and grouped themselves about the cosy, sanded bar, where the firelight was beginning to look cheerily ruddy in the fading afternoon.

"And I zaid," added Granfer, striking the sanded floor dogmatically with his stick, "'Zend for Miss Lilian—zend fur she.'"

"Ay, Granfer," growled the smith, "it's all very well for Miss Lilian. She ain't got a wife and seven children, and her bread to git."

"I zes, zes I," interposed the sceptic in the smock-frock, who had taken a pull at his tankard, and was removing the foam from his lips by the simple application of the back of his hand, "'Where's the use of a gal?' I've a zin it, and I believes it. I shouldn't a believed it if I hadn't a zin it."

"You never believes nothink," observed Jim. "Ah! if you'd a sin what I've a sin aboord the *Bellyruffian*——"

"Or if he'd a sin they there snake-charmers in India, what he won't believe in," added the soldier.

"Ah!" broke in the clerk, "you put Miss Lilian aboord the *Bellyruffian*, or take her out to Injy and let her charm snakes, and I'll war'nt she'll do it. That ar buoy Dick, whatever she done to he, nobody knows. A bad 'un he wer, wouldn't do nothing he hadn't a mind to. You med bate 'un till you couldn't stand. Wax have broke sticks about his back, and covered 'un with weals, but catch he gwine to school if he'd a mind to miche. I ses to Miss Lilian, I ses, 'I've a bate that ar buoy black and blue,' I ses, 'and I've a kep 'un without vittles this two days, and he wun't do nothun he an't a mind to.' And she ups and ses, 'Stevens,' she ses, 'I should like to bate you,' she ses; 'I should like to bate you green and yaller,' she ses. 'Lard love 'ee, Miss Lilian, whatever would ye bate I for?' I ses, ses I. 'Because you are a fool, Stevens,' she ses, 'and you are ruining that buoy, and turning him into a animal,' she ses. And she took 'un up Rectory, and kep' 'un there a day, and sent 'un home as good as gold. And she made me promise I wouldn't bate 'un no more for two good weeks, and I ain't bate 'un zince, and he'll do what he's told now without the stick. 'I should like to bate you green and yaller, Stevens,' she ses. And she'd a done it, she would, green and yaller—ah! that she would, mates."

"I don't deny," said Baines, the tailor, whose profession rendered him morbid, revolutionary, and inclined to distrust the utility of existing institutions, "but what Miss Lilian may have her uses."

"Ah, Baines," interrupted the soldier, "you ain't such a fool as you looks, after all."

Before the stupefied Baines, who was accustomed to have his remarks received with reverence, could reply to this insult, public feeling was suddenly outraged by the following observation from the smock-frocked sceptic, the want of wisdom in whom was accounted for by his having only recently come to Malbourne from a village at least ten miles off that centre of intelligence.

"But what shall us do when Miss Lilian gets married?"

"Married!" shouted the clerk. "And who ses she's a-gwine to marry?"

"She med marry; then agen she medn't," replied this foolish person, unabashed by the dark glances bent upon him.

"Miss Lilian," observed Granfer, who had been indulgently listening while he despatched his beer, and thus affording weaker

wits the opportunity of exercising themselves during his forbearance, "ain't agwine to marry nobody;" and, thrusting his staff forwards and resting his two hands upon it, Granfer looked round the assembly with austere menace in his shrewd grey eyes.

Nobody dared reply to this, and silence prevailed, broken only by the sound of good liquor disappearing down men's throats, and a weak, half-audible murmur from the smock-frock about girls being girls, whether gentle or simple.

"I zes to my missus, vive year agone last Middlemas, zes I," continued Granfer, who chanced to be the grandsire of the indignant clerk, "'Miss Lilian ain't one o' your marrying zart;'" and again Granfer looked round the assembly as if challenging them to deny the undeniable, and was met by an assenting murmur of "Ah's!"

"Miss Lilian," pursued Granfer, with an air of inspiration, "is turned vour and twenty. Vour and twenty year old come last May is they twins. Well I minds the night they was barned. The last time as ever I druv a 'oss. A vrosty night 'twas, and nipped all the archards miles round, and there warn't no vruit that year. Ah! Varmer Long he'd a lost dree and dirty yowes lambing-time that year. Well I minds it. I druv pony-chaise into Oldport, and vetched out t' doctor. And I zes to my missus, I zes, when I come home, 'Master's got twins!' Ay, that's what I zed, zure enough. And my missus she zes, zes she, 'Lard love 'ee, Granfer,' she zes, 'you don't zay zo!' she zes;" and again Granfer paused and looked round to perceive the effect of his eloquence.

"Ay," said the landlord, feeling that courtesy now obliged him to entertain the intellects as well as the bodies of his guests, "twins is zummat when it comes to that. Twins is bad enough for poor volk, but when it comes to ladies and they, Lard 'a massey!"

"Ah!" murmured Granfer, shaking his head with profound wisdom, and at the same time regretfully contemplating the vacuum in his beer-pot, "them twins done for Mrs. Maitland. She ain't ben the zame 'ooman zince, never zimmed to perk up agen arter that. Vine children they was, too, as ever you'd wish to zee, and brought up on Varmer Long's Alderney cow, kep' special vor 'um, as I used to vetch the milk marnin' and evenin'. I did, zure enough."

Here Tom, the soldier, who, in virture of his red coat, was bound to be susceptible to feminine charms, opined that Miss Lilian was still "a smartish-looking gal;" and Jim, the sailor, added that he didn't see why she shouldn't pick up some smart lad yet, for his heart was warm, and he could not bear to consign an un-

offending girl to the chills of single blessedness. There was Lieutenant Everard, of the *Bellerophon*, a frequent visitor at the Rectory, for example—as smart an officer as Jim had ever seen, he added.

"Ah, goo on wi' ye!" cried Granfer, greatly refreshed by the polite replenishment of his pot at Tom's expense. "Miss Lilian's as pretty a maid as Tom'll zee in a day's march. But she wun't marry nobody. Vur why? zes I. Cause she wun't ha'e the common zart, and the upper crust they wun't ha'e she."

"W'atever's come over Judkins now?" asked Hale, the wheelwright, musingly. "He'd had a drop too much 's afternoon, and he was a latherin' into Hotspur like mad coming down shoot.* He hadn't ought to treat a hoss like that."

"A man med well drink," said the tailor, "afore trusting hisself to a animal like that there. Steady as Charlie Judkins was, poor chap! What these 'ere rich men 'a got to answer for!"

"I never zeen a 'oss rampageouser," replied the smith; "but I never zeen a 'oss Miss Lilian couldn't quiet, or a ass either."

"Your missus 'ull be sending for her one day, then," said Jim; and the whole assembly broke into a loud guffaw, after which Granfer very impressively related the history of the hunted fox, which appeared one day with his paws on the window-sill of Lilian's sitting-room, followed by the pack in full cry, and the whole field at no great distance. He told how Lilian quickly opened the window, Reynard leapt in, and she as quickly shut it; and how the huntsman, on finding the hounds at check round the Rectory window, looked in, and was greatly shocked to see poor Reynard's pointed nose and glittering eyes peering out from among the skirts of a young lady sitting quietly at work, and tranquilly surveying the baffled hounds baying outside.

Lilian refused to deliver up her fugitive, holding parley with the master of the hounds through the closed and latched window, until the latter had withdrawn his pack; and it was not until the premises had been cleared a good half-hour of every vestige of hound, horse, and man, that she unbolted door or window, and suffered her weary, panting prisoner to depart, which he did with evident regret and thankfulness for hospitality—a hospitality poorly requited by him, since he managed to snatch a chick from the poultry-yard in effecting his escape.

But no one seemed to think there was anything unusual in Lilian's power over living creatures; it was simply what one expected of Miss Lilian, just as one expected church bells to ring and cocks to crow. Nor had any one thanked her for assisting so effectively at the shoeing of Hotspur.

* A short steep hill on the highway.

Then followed a long history of animals healed by Lilian, and in particular of a dog of Ingram Swaynestone's, which the latter was going to shoot, when she begged its life, and nursed it into health. Also of the racers Ingram had at a trainer's, and the money he lost by them; of the oaks and beeches at Swaynestone, which had to expiate these losses; and of the young fellow's probable descent to beggary through the paths of pleasure.

"He's a vine young veller," observed Granfer, at the close of his second pot; "a wild 'un zurely. His vather was a wild 'un, too; 'tis the blood and the high veeding So was his grandfather. I minds things as Sir Lionel did would make 'ee all stare. Men is just the zame as 'osses—veed 'em up, and they vlings. The well-bred 'uns is vive times skittisher than t'others. Wuld Sir Lionel, he was the wildest of all—druv his stags into Oldport vour-in-hand, he did, and killed dree or vour volks in the streets. Ah! times isn't what they was," sighed Granfer, regretfully draining his pot.

By this time it was dark night. The Sun windows threw a warm glow over the road; the stars sparkled keenly above the thatched roof of the little hostel; and the smell of wood-smoke, mingled with the appetizing odour of fried pork, red herrings, and onion soup, rising all over the village, warned the topers that the hour of supper was approaching, and they would have dispersed, however unwillingly, but for the chimes of waggon-bells along the road, which beguiled them into waiting while William Grove deposited his parcels at the Sun, took the one glass offered by the host, and recounted the news from Oldport.

CHAPTER VI.

On looking back in after-life to that brisk winter's walk, both Everard and Maitland held it as one of their sunniest memories. Every step seemed to put a fresh lustre in Cyril's eyes, and add to the wine-like sparkle of his conversation. In proportion as his spirits fell at one time, they rose at another by virtue of his sensitive, emotional temperament; while Henry's steady, sunny cheerfulness went on deepening more slowly, but perhaps more surely, and at last bubbled over. Presently they passed a woman toiling up a hill with a baby and a basket, of both which burdens Everard relieved her, to her unbounded surprise, coolly handing the basket to Cyril, and himself bearing the baby, which he tossed till it

crowed with ecstasy. Having left these trifles at a roadside cottage, with a shilling to requite the woman for the loan of her infant, they reached Swaynestone Park, and met Ben Lee, who was crossing the road on his way from his cottage to the stables.

Everard greeted him with a cordiality to which Lee replied gruffly, and with an evident intention of hurrying on.

"Oh, come, Lee," said Everard, "you are not so busy as all that! How are they all up at the Temple? Alma's roses in full bloom, I hope? And my patient, Mrs. Lee, has she quite got over the accident? I shall be looking in very soon."

"You may save yourself the trouble, Dr. Everard," returned Lee, in a surly manner; "thank 'ee kindly all the same. But I want no more gentlefolk up at my house. I've had enough of they. Good afternoon, Mr. Cyril; glad to see you home, sir;" and, touching his hat, he passed quickly on, leaving Everard in a state of stupefaction in the middle of the road.

"What the deuce is the matter with Lee?" he exclaimed. "Surely he can't be drunk, Cyril!"

All the light had faded from Cyril's radiant face. The moment he caught sight of the coachman, he made the old movement of pressing his hand to his side in a spasm of pain, and he seemed almost as impatient of delay as Lee himself.

"I never heard of his drinking," he replied evasively. "Perhaps things have gone wrong with him. Look here, Henry! let us cut the high-road, and get home across country; we shall save half a mile, and find the ladies at tea."

"What sense can you get out of a fellow in love?" returned Everard, leading the way over the stile. "For him mankind dwindles down to a slim puss of a girl, with dimples and a pair of brown eyes. Go on, man! 'Gather ye rosebuds while ye may;'" and, lilting out the gay old ballad with all the strength of his honest lungs, Everard resumed his light-hearted manner, and did not observe that Cyril's gaiety had become forced and spasmodic.

A ruddy glow above the wooded crests of Northover was all that remained of day when they entered the Rectory grounds by the churchyard path, and found Lilian, with the cat gravely coiled at her feet at the hall door, darkly outlined against the faint, crimson light of the hall stove.

"Your instinct is infallible, Lilian," said Cyril, embracing her; "for you were not even sure that I was coming to-night. Dear Lilian, it *is* nice to see you again!"

"I am glad not to be wholly eclipsed by the new star," she replied, laughing, yet scanning his face with some anxiety, while

she continued to hold his hand. Then she turned to Henry, over whose spirits an unaccountable damp had descended, and offered him her hand; while Cyril stooped to stroke Mark Antony, who was triumphantly rubbing himself round and round his legs with loud purrs and exultant tail. "I am so glad you have brought him, Henry," she said; adding, in a lower voice "He is looking horribly ill."

By this time Mr. Maitland, the children, the dogs, and all the servants were in the hall, greeting Cyril with such enthusiasm that Henry remained for some moments unnoticed by Lilian's side.

"You all seem extremely glad to see *Cyril*," he observed to her, with rueful emphasis.

"Dear Henry, I know we are horribly rude to our guests when we have Cyril to spoil," she replied, laying her hand gently on his arm.

He took the hand in his and pressed it warmly to his side, and felt that the rainbow radiance had suddenly returned to his universe. But the bright moment was very brief, for it was now his turn to be welcomed, and by the time he was free to go into the drawing-room, Lilian was not to be seen.

"But where is Marion?" asked Cyril, looking round the drawing-room, after he had duly saluted his mother, who was, as usual, on her couch.

"I think you will find her in my room," replied Lilian, as indifferently as if she had not specially arranged for the lovers to meet there. "We dine punctually at half-past seven. No, Henry, you foolish fellow, you are to stay here," she added, as Cyril left the room, and Henry attempted to follow him.

"A brother, I suppose, is of no account in these days," grumbled Everard, seating himself by Mrs. Maitland's couch with a contented air, nevertheless. "All this courtship is sickening to me, Mrs. Maitland. As for that hopeful son of yours, not one word of sense have I got out of him this day, or do I expect to get for the next two months. Thank goodness, it must come to an end then, and they will settle down to a life's squabbling like sane people."

"Ah, young people! young people!" said Mr. Maitland, looking very happy about it. "We must not be hard upon them, Henry. We all go mad once—Lennie will turn that back into Latin for you, eh?—But we consider Cyril and Marion a very sensible young couple, don't we, Nellie?"

"I think," replied Mrs. Maitland, laughing, "that we consider everything that Cyril does sensible. When his biography

is written, it will be said that his family did, to a certain extent, appreciate him."

Whereupon the conversation turned upon Cyril and his doings and his prospects, and their anxiety about him, and suddenly the thought struck chill to Everard's marrow—What would happen, in case of Cyril's failure, death, or other misadventure, to the innocent family circle of which he was the central hope?

The curtains were drawn snugly against the frosty cold without. Eliza, all smiles and fresh cap-ribbons, brought a lamp and tea; and Everard wondered if heaven could possibly be an improvement on the present. No one ever made or poured out tea like Lilian, he thought; no tea ever had so divine an effect on the nervous system as hers. For weeks he had dreamed of sitting thus by the drawing-room fire, his whole being pervaded by the delicious fact of her presence, and now he found the reality sweeter than the dream.

Not for weeks only, but for years afterwards, did the memory of that fireside scene shine warmly on the darkness of his life. The lamplight was so soft that the fire, on which Lennie had thrown some fir-cones, disputed for mastery with it, and added to the cheery radiance of the pretty drawing-room. On one side of the fire, Mrs. Maitland, still beautiful, though faded, and exquisitely dressed, lay on her couch amidst becomingly arranged furs and shawls; Henry sat by her on a low seat, and rendered her various little filial attentions; Mr. Maitland sat facing the fire, with its light playing on his silvery hair and clean-cut features, the prototype of Cyril's.

On the other side of the hearth sat Lilian, with the tea-table at her side; Winnie was on a stool at her feet, her head pressed to her sister's knee, on which reposed, in careless majesty, Mark Antony, gracefully toying with the golden curls tossed in pretty negligence within reach of his paws. The warm rug before the fire was occupied by the terrier and the pug, the children's tea-cups, and the recumbent full-length of Lennie, who sprang to his feet from time to time to pass people's cups.

Lilian spoke little. She and Henry did not address each other once; but his eye never lost the picture on the opposite side of the fire, which reminded him of Raphael's Virgin of the Cardellino. It was not that Lilian's intelligent face in the least resembled that harmless, faultlessly featured Madonna's, though her deep grey eyes were bent down much in the same way on the child-face and sportive animal on her knee as the Virgin's in the picture. It was the look of divine, innocent, ineffable content that she wore. And yet Everard did not appear to be looking

at this charming picture, though Lilian knew that he saw it, and was equally conscious of the picture he made, his broad shoulders and athletic limbs affording a fine contrast to her mother's fragile, faded grace.

"And what are your plans, Henry?" asked Mr. Maitland at last, when Cyril's affairs had been discussed over and over again.

"I think of buying a good practice near Southampton, and settling down as a country doctor," he replied. "I have enough property to make me fairly independent, and shall be able to carry on my scientific pursuits without fear of starvation."

"And the next step, I suppose, will be to take a wife?"

"The very next step," replied Everard, looking thoughtfully into the glowing heart of the fire.

Lilian bent her head a little, and caught away a curl at which Mark Antony was snatching. "If no one is going to have any more tea, pussie shall have the rest of the cream," she said.

Cyril, in the mean time, quickly found his way to the well-known room called Lilian's, where Marion was sitting, in the dusk, alone, but acutely conscious of the light, swift steps along the corridor which bore her expected lover to her side. They met in silence, each young heart being too full for speech; and it was not until Cyril had released Marion from his embrace, and placed her in a chair by the fireside, that he said, kneeling on the rug near her,

"Am I indeed quite forgiven, Marion?"

"You foolish fellow! How many times have I written that word?" she replied, laughing.

"Written, yes; but I want to hear it from your own lips—I want to be quite sure," he continued, with unabated earnestness, the blue fire of his eyes bent upon her soft brown gaze, while he held both her hands pressed against his breast.

"Dear Cyril, you make too much of what is better forgotten," she said. "We quarrelled long ago and made it up long ago, though we have not met since."

"Forgotten? Oh, Marion, do you think I can ever forget? And though you forgive me, do you think I can ever forgive myself?"

"Certainly. Don't lovers always quarrel; and are they not better friends afterwards? And don't you mean to forgive poor me? I have forgiven us both; though, indeed, those few months were very dreadful."

"Dreadful! They were more than dreadful to me. Oh, Marion, if you knew, if you only dreamed, how unworthy I am, you who are so white, so stainless! You can never guess. Sometimes I

wonder that I ever dare hope to call you mine, so black am I in comparison with you."

"Cyril, this is lover's talk—exaggeration. It makes me feel ashamed," she replied, soft blushes stealing over her gentle face in the firelight; "it makes me remember that I am but a weak, foolish girl, and greatly need the guidance of a strong, good man like you."

"Good! God help me!" he exclaimed, turning his face from the modest glance that seemed to scorch his very soul. "Marion, I am not good; there is no weaker man than I on God's earth, and without you I think I should be utterly lost. Do you know—no, you never can know—what it is to be able to love a good woman; to feel the vileness die out of one at the very thought of her; to be strengthened and purified by the very atmosphere she breathes; —to feel at the thought of losing her—Marion, dear Marion, I think sometimes if you knew the darkness that was upon my soul during those wretched months when we were parted, I fear—oh, I fear that you would cast me off with loathing and scorn——'

Marion smiled a gentle smile, only dimly seeing the passionate agony in Cyril's shadowed face. "I know that I could never scorn *you*," she interrupted, with tender emphasis.

Cyril bent his head over her hands in silence for a few seconds; and then, looking up again, said, in a more collected manner, "Marion, will you take me, worthless as I am, and bear with me and cleave to me through good and evil report, and help me, in spite of the past, to be a better man?"

"Dear," she replied gently, "I have taken you for better and for worse. I don't expect you to be faultless, though I do admire and honour you above all men. I should be sorry if you were faultless, because, you know, I am not faultless myself; I am not like Lilian, even. We shall help each other to be wiser and better, I hope."

Cyril had averted his face from the innocent, loving gaze he could not endure, but he turned once more and looked into Marion's charming face, which was radiant in a sudden burst of firelight, while his own remained in darker shadow than ever. "Promise once more," he said, in low, impassioned tones, "that you will never leave me."

Marion suffered herself to glide into the embrace before her, and repeated the promise, half laughing to herself at the foolish importance assigned to trifles by lovers, and half believing in the intensity of the oft-repeated assurances, and was very happy until a discreet clatter of silver and china was heard outside, followed by a knock at the door, and, after an interval, the entrance of

Eliza, who was edified to find Marion at one end of the room, adjusting some china on a bracket, and Cyril at the other, gazing out of the window with great interest at the frosty stars.

When the candles were lighted, the curtains drawn, and the tea poured out, all traces of his passionate agitation had left Cyril's beautiful, severely cut features, and he sat by Marion's side, tea-cup in hand, quiet and content, the very picture of the ideal curate of commonplace just dropped in to tea.

Marion now saw him clearly, and was distressed at his wan and worn appearance, and also at a certain look he never had before the fatal winter she passed in the Mediterranean with her brother. Since then she had met him face to face but once, on the day when he came to ask forgiveness and renew the engagement, and then, naturally, he did not look like his old self. Was it only toil which had robbed Cyril of the bloom of his youth? she wondered; and she sighed. "It was time you had a holiday, I think," she said softly. "You must not be such an ascetic any more; you do not belong to a celibate priesthood, remember."

"This is not exactly the cell of an anchorite," replied Cyril, with the smile which won so many hearts, as he rested his head comfortably on the back of his low chair, and gazed upon Marion's slender grace. "Mayn't I have another lump of sugar, Marion? Lilian and I have expended much thought on the decoration of this room."

"And taste," said Marion, looking round upon the pictures and *bric-à-brac* and various evidences of cultured taste, though it is not to be supposed that the two lovers were there to discuss nothing but the decoration of Lilian's room.

Cyril had spoken hotly of his dislike to Marion's Mediterranean tour; and Marion's pride had been touched till she reminded him that she was entirely her own mistress, and might probably continue so to the end of the chapter. Then ensued a quarrel, only half serious on either side, a quarrel that a word or a look would have righted in a moment. But, unfortunately, Marion had to join her friends, the Wilmots, sooner than she anticipated, and thus hurried off before she could say good-bye to Cyril and make things straight with one little smile.

The game of quarrelling, when carried on between two young, ardent lovers, is a very pretty diversion, but cannot possibly be played at a distance, as these two found to their cost. Deprived of the fairy artillery of glances, sighs, voices, and gestures, and confined to the heavy ordnance of letters, they could not bring things to a happy conclusion. Letters were first hot, then cold, then rare, then non-existent, until one day Cyril wrote, after long

silence, to ask Marion how long she meant to play with his affections. Marion replied that if Cyril considered their engagement as a mere pastime, the sooner it was broken off the better. Cyril wrote back to release her from an engagement which he said he perceived had become distasteful to her.

This was in March. At Whitsuntide, Everard spent some time at Malbourne, whence Cyril went to Belminster for ordination at Trinity. He thought Cyril unhappy, and after the ordination he asked him, subsequently to some conversation with Lilian on the subject, if he still cared for Marion, to which Cyril replied in the affirmative. Then Henry told him that Marion was pining and showing tendencies to consumption. She was the kind of woman, he said, whose health is perfect in happiness, but who breaks down the moment that elixir of life is denied. He thought that she loved Cyril still.

Thus emboldened, Cyril owned himself in the wrong, and sued for a return to favour. He could, however, only afford one brief interview with Marion, since he had with some difficulty freed himself from the curacy at Shotover, which had given him a title to deacon's orders, and got himself placed on a mission staff in the East of London, where he led a semi-monastic life in a house with his fellow-curates, and enjoyed to the full the hard labour for which he had clamoured so eagerly while at Shotover.

The situation was eminently unfavourable to courtship, while it seemed to render marriage absolutely impracticable. Cyril, however, found a means of reconciling duty with inclination, and easily convinced his rector that his labours would be equally valuable if he had a home of his own within easy reach of the scene of his toils, and thus they were to be married in the spring. The narrow means which so frequently darken the horizon of curates' love-dreams had no place in this romance, since both Cyril and Marion had wherewithal to keep the wolf from the door.

But they are together at last, and the dark days which divided them are to be forgotten.

"When I hear the word 'misery,' I think of last spring," said Marion, laughing.

Cyril's face clouded, and he turned away and gazed at the fire. "Never think of it!" he exclaimed, suddenly turning a bright, animated gaze upon Marion. "I shall drive it from your memory, dear, by every act and thought of my life."

Dinner, the hour so fondly welcomed by mortals in general, came all too soon for these; and, indeed, it was not till the others had taken their places at the table that Marion made her appear-

ance, flushed and charming, and met her brother for the first time since his arrival in the house.

"This is an improvement," he said, holding her at arm's length to look at her, "on the mealy-faced girl I saw three months ago. Pray, miss, where do you get your rouge?"

"Manufactured on the estate, Henry," replied Mr. Maitland. "Native Malbourne rouge. Let us hope Cyril may acquire some of it."

"It comes off easily," said Everard, gravely, while Cyril became absorbed in Mark Antony, who sat on a stool at Lilian's side at the head of the table, with his chin on a level with the cloth, and who was so enchanted to find himself with a twin on each side of him, that his deep mellifluous purrs threatened to drown the conversation.

"You will be glad to hear that Granfer is still alive and well, and wiser than ever, Henry," said Mrs. Maitland, who was sitting on his right, having, as usual, resigned the head of the table to Lilian.

"I congratulate Malbourne, Mrs. Maitland. It could never go on without Granfer's advice. And the discontented Baines has not yet blown you all up? And friend Wax still wields the ferule in defiance of Lilian?"

"But not in church," said Lilian.

"Because Lilian steals the cane if he brings it," added Marion.

"And is anybody engaged, or born, or dead?" continued Everard, gaily. "By the way, what has happened to Ben Lee? It struck me that he had been drinking this afternoon. And our friend Alma, how is she?"

There was a dead silence for a second or two, and Everard's eager gaze of inquiry met no response from the eyes bent resolutely on the plates.

"Let me send you some more beef, Henry," said Mr. Maitland, looking up from his joint with sudden briskness. "Come, where is your boasted appetite? Yes, bring Dr. Everard's plate, Eliza."

"But Alma? Oh, I hope there is nothing wrong with her?" continued Everard, looking round with a dismayed gaze, while Mrs. Maitland laid her hand warningly on his sleeve. "Oh, Lilian, Alma is not dead?"

"Worse," replied Lilian, in a low voice—"far worse."

There were tears, he saw, trembling upon her eyelashes; and if ever tears resembled pearls, then, he thought, did those precious drops, and if ever mortal woman was dear, then was Lilian. He

saw it all now on the instant, and he remembered how much Lilian had done for Alma, and how at Whitsuntide she had spoken of her and cared about her absence from the Sacrament, and so dismayed was he by this catastrophe that, having none of the ready resources and fine tact which ensure social success, he simply, like the honest, clumsy fellow he was, dropped his knife and fork, and gazed horror-struck before him. Fortunately, at that moment, Lennie, who was stretched on the hearthrug, intent upon "Ivanhoe," bethought himself of an important event, and took advantage of the silence to proclaim it.

"I say, Henry," he exclaimed, "what do you think? I'm going into trousers to-morrow."

"Why, it was all over Oldport," said Cyril. "Bills in every window. 'Oh yes! oh yes! oh yes! Know all by these presents that Lennie Maitland goes into trousers to-morrow."

"Oh, won't I smack you by-and-by!" observed Lennie, tranquilly returning to the gests of Brian de Bois-Guilbert.

"I think, Cyril, you scarcely appreciate the honour your brother intends you," said Mr. Maitland. "He dons these virile garments for the purpose of hearing your sermon. He evidently holds trousers to be conducive to a pious frame of mind, or at least to a certain mental receptivity; eh, Lennie, lad?"

"The unfortunate tailor's life has been a burden to him in the fear that the suit would not be ready in time," said Mrs. Maitland.

"In time to hear Cywil pweach," added Marion, laughing.

"How many times have they been tried on, Lennie?" asked Lilian.

"Never you mind their rubbish," said Everard; "ask Miss Mawion how often she calls me Henwy?"

"And Cywil will line the pockets with silver for you," added Cyril, who was looking very happy, having, as Eliza observed with satisfaction, his hand locked in Marion's under the tablecloth.

No sooner had the ladies withdrawn, than Everard burst out, "And who is the scoundrel?"

"Softly, softly, Henry! beware of rash judgments," returned Mr. Maitland, whose face took a grieved look. "Nothing is known, which is hateful to me because of the great wave of scandal and the dreadful scorching of tongues which arises about the matter. Lee, I know not why, assumes that it is a gentleman; and public opinion, and, I fear I must add, his reputation, point to Ingram Swaynestone. Sir Lionel has spoken to him, but he absolutely denies it; and indeed——"

"In short," broke in Cyril, who was extremely busy with

some walnuts on his plate, "the less said about these miserable scandals the better."

"True, quite true," said his father, with a heavy sigh.

"But Alma! the little girl we used to play with at the Temple, with Lilian, and often Ingram, and the girl Swaynestones!" cried Henry. "I cannot believe any wrong of her. She has been wronged—of that I am sure."

"Truly, I had never dreamed of such trouble for Alma, poor child!" said Mr. Maitland. "Elsewhere in the parish, of course, one dreads such things, knowing their temptations. It is a heavy grief for me, Henry, as you may imagine."

"And for Lilian," added Everard. "Yes, I know how you love your spiritual children, sir, and can imagine your distress. And poor Lee, he was so proud of her. He is sullen, I see; a sure sign of grief. Oh, I hope he is not unkind to her!"

"The stepmother is hard, and has a sharp tongue! She forgets what poor Alma did for her child. Altogether, it is a sad, sad history. The Temple, I suppose, holds more unhappiness than any house in the county."

"Oh, really, my dear father," exclaimed Cyril, who seemed pained beyond endurance, "you must not take it so to heart! She is not the first——"

"By Jove, Maitland!" interrupted Everard, "you are the last man from whom I should expect an echo of Mephistopheles. He never said anything more diabolical than that—'Sie ist die Erste nicht.'"

Cyril coloured so hotly that he exhibited the phenomenon of a black blush, while Mr. Maitland hastened to say that Cyril was in a different position from Faust, who had wrought the wrong. "And then," he added, "Cyril is doubtless weary of sin and sorrow, of which, in his parish, he must have far more than we in our simple rustic home have any idea of, busy as Satan undoubtedly is everywhere."

"Quite so," returned Cyril, wearily. "My words sounded unfortunately, Everard; but as my father suggests, when one has breakfasted and lunched for weeks upon peccant parishioner, one does not enjoy the same dish at dinner."

Everard's rejoinder was prevented by the intrusion of a sunny head at the door, and the clear voice of Winnie was heard crying, "Do make haste! Me and Lennie want to know what is in that basket, and Lilian won't let us." Whereupon Cyril sprang up and chased the delighted child through the hall and into the drawing-room, where she took refuge, screaming, in Lilian's dress.

The basket which so stimulated the children's curiosity wa

well known to contain the young men's Christmas gifts to the family, and was forthwith uncovered amid a scene of joyous turbulence, and had its contents distributed.

The task of collecting the parcels in the basket and conveying them to the drawing-room had been performed by Eliza with thrills of delicious agony, for it was almost beyond human nature not to take at least one peep at a packet containing the very ribbon she longed for, and at another revealing glimpses of a perfect love of a shawl, which proved to be destined for cook. However, she appeared with a perfectly demure countenance when fetched by Lennie, with the other maids, to receive her presents. By that time Mr. Maitland had become lost to all earthly cares, in an arm-chair, with an old battered volume Everard had picked up at a bookstall in Paris for him; Winnie was wondering if some fairy had informed Henry that a fishing-rod of her very own had been her soul's unattainable star for months; and Lennie was dancing round the room with an illustrated "Don Quixote" clasped in his arms.

It was pleasant to see Cyril making his gifts. Each was offered with a suitable word, tender or droll, according to the recipient, and with a grace that an emperor might have envied, though a carping observer would have detected that the gifts themselves had been purchased as nearly as possible at the same shop. As for Everard, he made his offerings with a sneaking air, and seemed glad to get them off his hands. He threw the "Don Quixote" at Lennie, with "Here, you scamp!" and placed the invalid reading-stand by Mrs. Maitland, with an awkward, "I don't know if this thing will be any good to you."

"Why, Henry, who told you that father's life has been a burden to him for months for want of that old edition?" asked Lilian.

"He is a wizard; he should be burnt," laughed Cyril, reflecting inwardly that while his gifts cost money, Everard's cost time and thought and infinite trouble in hunting out.

"But ain't Lilian to have anything?" inquired the ingenuous Lennie; for Lilian and Cyril never gave each other presents—they had things so much in common, and Everard appeared to have forgotten her.

Lilian appealed, as usual, to Mark Antony for sympathy, and Everard grew very hot, while Cyril absorbed himself in fitting the bracelet he had given to Marion upon her slender arm. Then Lilian looked up.

'It was horrid of you to forget me, Henry," she said.

"I didn't forget you," stammered Everard; "but the thing

was so trifling I hadn't the courage—— It's only a photograph of the picture which inspired Browning's 'Guardian Angel.' Here it is, if you think it worth having. You said you would give anything to see Guercino's picture at Fano."

"Oh, Henry, how very kind and thoughtful of you!" exclaimed Lilian, her face transfigured with pleasure. "But I thought there was no photograph?"

"Well, no; but young Stobart was doing Italy in the autumn, and I got him to go to Fano with his camera. It wasn't far out of his way," he replied, in a tone of apology.

Lennie's solicitude being relieved, he and the others were absorbed each after his own fashion; no one observed these two. Lilian looked up at Henry, who had thrown himself into a low chair by her side, so that their faces were on a level. Her eyes were dewy and bright; they gazed straight into his for a minute, and then fell. "You had it done for me," she murmured.

It was the crowning moment of Everard's happy night. He bent over the spirit-like hand resting on the cat, and unseen pressed his lips to it. He knew that Lilian loved him, and knew that he loved her. He said nothing more; it was enough bliss for one day.

CHAPTER VII.

Before going to rest that night, Mr. Maitland led Everard to his study, and there subjected him to a searching cross-examination on the subject of Cyril's care-worn and unhealthy appearance, which Everard referred to his overzeal in his labours, and the excessive austerities which he practised.

"It would be all very well for him to mortify his flesh if he had too much of it to balance his spirit," Everard observed; "but, as a matter of fact, he has too little."

"Cyril is sensitive," his father replied; "his nerves are too tensely strung, like those of all extremely refined and poetic natures. We thought, Lilian and I, that it was the estrangement from Marion which was preying on him. It was that which caused him to leave Shotover, and plunge into this terrific London work —that and, of course, higher motives."

"Cyril, though healthy, is delicate," replied Everard. "He ought never to fast; he cannot bear it, especially when working His brain will give way under such discipline. Observe him to-

morrow when he preaches. There is too much nervous excitement."

The next morning Cyril did not appear till the end of breakfast, and then took nothing but a cup of coffee.

"Really, Cyril, I did think Sunday at least was a feast-day!" cried Everard, pausing in his own manful assault on a well-piled plate of beef.

"But Cyril is to celebrate to-day; he must fast," Lilian explained; and then Everard observed that Mr. Maitland's breakfast consisted of nothing, and groaned within himself, and asked his friends if they considered it decorous for clergymen to faint in the midst of public worship.

"When a man has to work, he should feed himself into proper condition," he said to unheeding ears.

After breakfast, the Maitland family repaired in a body to the Sunday school, and Everard went out to smoke a pipe alone, and, the frost being keen, he wore an overcoat, finding one of his own in the hall. He had some difficulty in putting it on, and could not by any means induce it to meet across the chest. This gave him great satisfaction. "It cannot be that my Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes take up so much room," he mused. "No; I am increasing in girth round the chest. Who could imagine that one night's happiness and country air would produce such an effect? A new scientific fact."

It was pleasant on the lawn in the frosty Sunday stillness. The sunbeams danced on the evergreens and smiled on the Shotover parklands; a robin sang its cheerfully pathetic song; and a flock of rooks uttered their breezy caws in the pale blue above his head. Everard smoked with profound enjoyment; he thought of last night's enchantment, and the promise he had just extracted from Lilian to sit with him in the Rectory pew instead of with the school-children. His hands were thrust for warmth into his coat-pockets, and in one of them he felt the square outline of a letter, which he drew out, wondering—since his habits were neat and methodical, as became a student of natural science—how he came to leave a letter there. The letter, however, had no envelope and no address. He opened it, and found, in the half-formed, clear writing of an unlearned person, probably some patient in humble life, the following:—

"No, I will never, never marry you. What good could that do me, now you do not love me no more—me that loved you better than Heaven and her own poor soul? Would I like to see you miserable, and spoil your prospex? To marry the likes of

me would ruin you, and how could that make me happy? Marry *her;* it is better for you. I have done wrong for love of you, and God will punish me. But you are sorry, and will be forgiven. Farewell for ever.

"Your broken-hearted

"A."

The gracious light of the wintry morning seemed to fade out of the pale pure sky; there was no more delight in the robin's song; the bright crystals of the hoar-frost sparkled in vain for Everard. "Why, why are there such things?" he murmured. "Why was Cyril's echo of Mephistopheles so much more poignant in its cynicism because of its truth?"

The weak suffering, the strong going scot-free; Alcestis plunging, love-radiant, into the darkness of Hades, while Admetus rejoices in the light of heaven; women trusting, and men deceiving—what a world! All the confused misery of the painful insoluble riddle of earth seemed to awake and trouble the clear happiness of Everard's soul at the story told in the poor little scrap of paper, the more pathetic for its bad spelling and artless grammar. And how came such an epistle in his pocket? Doubtless some friend had borrowed his coat; some heedless rackety medical student, perchance, and flavoured it with tobacco and correspondence. "Sie ist die Erste nicht," the rooks seemed to say in their pleasant, fresh morning caws.

But now the bells came chiming slowly on the clear air, those dear, drowsy three strokes which awoke in his heart so many echoes of home and boyhood and sweet innocent life beneath the beloved roof where Lilian dwelt; bells calling people to come and pray, to think of God and heaven, and forsake all the sin and sorrow of the troubled earth—calling people to hear how even such black things as the letter told of might be made white again like snow; to hear the kind fatherly counsels of such as Mr. Maitland or Cyril. And his heart swelled when he thought that Cyril had devoted his stainless youth, his bright promise, and his splendid gifts to a calling which, however vainly, tried to stem the tide of all this mad, sad evil, and lift men out of the mire of earth's misery. How beautiful to have Cyril's faith, and the power of thus consecrating himself! How poor in comparison his own career, devoted merely to the healing of men's bodies, to the satisfaction of noble desire for knowledge, and the widening the horizon of men's thoughts!

Like all thinkers, and especially those whose thoughts dwell much on the study of natural facts, Everard had many doubts,

and often feared that the Christianity so dear to him through instinct, training, and association, might be, after all, but a fairy dream. But the atmosphere of Malbourne, and more especially the influence of Mr. Maitland's genuine and practical piety, together with Cyril's bright enthusiasm, quenched these doubts as nothing else could; and now the village bells fell like balm on his troubled soul, and he responded with cheery good temper to Lennie, who came bounding over the lawn in the proud consciousness of trousers, crying, "Come along, Henry, and look at Lilian's donkey."

He thrust the paper in his pocket, and, taking the little fellow's hand, trotted off with him towards Winnie, who was approaching them at headlong pace, with curls streaming in the wind, and soon seized his other hand, and led him to the meadow, where he beheld one of the sorriest beasts he had ever set eyes on, cropping the frosty grass, and winking lazily in the sun.

"What can Lilian do with such a creature?" he asked.

"Oh, she makes it happy, like all her things," replied Lennie. "Won't you stare when you see her three-legged cat, and the fox with the broken leg she has in the stable!"

"She likes hurt things," commented Winnie, while Lennie related how Lilian met this donkey one day in the road leading over the downs. It was harnessed to a cart laden with vegetables, and had fallen between the shafts, where its owner, a brutal, bad fellow, well known in Malbourne, was furiously belabouring it.

"Didn't he stare when Lilian caught him by the collar and pulled him off the donkey!" said Lennie. "Then he fell all of a tremble, and Lilian told him he would be sent to prison or fined. And he said he was too poor to buy another donkey, and couldn't help this one growing old and weak. So Lilian gave him ten shillings for it."

"Dear Lilian!" Everard said to himself, as he looked at the wretched beast, with its stiff limbs and body scarred by old sores and stripes. "Which do you love best, Winnie, Lilian or Cyril?"

"Cyril," replied both children, unhesitatingly, but could give no reason for their preference, until Lennie, after long cogitation, said, "He does make a fellow laugh so."

Everard smiled, and thought of Wordsworth's boy with his weathercock. The day was warmer now, and bidding Lennie run indoors with his great coat, he set off to church with the children.

It was a matter of time for a person of any consideration to get through Malbourne Churchyard, for there, grouped upon either

side the porch, lounged a little crowd of Malbourne worthies, solemnly passing the churchgoers in review, and headed, of course, by Granfer in a clean white smock-frock, and with his hale old many-coloured visage and veined hands looking purplish in the frosty air. Tom Hale was there, making a bright centre to the cool-toned picture in his red tunic and spotless, well-brushed clothes; while Jim, with open breast and sailor garb, lent a bit of picturesque that not even the Sunday coats of Baines's manufacture could quite subdue.

Lennie held up his head, and felt that his trousers were making a deep impression; while Everard stopped and wished a good morning to them all, smock-frocks, Sunday coats, and uniforms, and received a little dignified patronage from Granfer, who had always regarded him with some disparagement, as being neither a Swaynestone nor a Maitland, but a mere appendage to the latter family, a circumstance which helped to render Granfer the delight of Everard's life.

The present moment did not find Granfer conversational, his mental powers being concentrated on observing the animated scene before him. There was Farmer Long, with his wife and daughters in their warm scarlets and purples, to scrutinize as they strolled along the road and over the churchyard path; then the more distant farmers, who drove up to the lych-gate in old-fashioned gigs, and, having dropped their families, hastened to the Sun to put up the strong, coarse-limbed horses; then came the Garretts from Northover, new people, whom Malbourne regarded, with a mixture of scorn and envy, as mere mushroom pretenders. They came on foot, their own gates being but a stone's-throw from the church, a handsome family of sons and daughters, coeval with the Maitlands. To them Granfer's salutation was almost infinitesimal in its elaborate graduation. Then, blending with the drowsy chime of the three bells, arose the clatter of hoofs and the roll of wheels, and the Swaynestone landau, with its splendid high-stepping horses, swept easily up to the gate, the silver-mounted harness, the silken coats of the steeds, the panels, and the revolving wheel-spokes flashing in the sun. Granfer did not know it, but perhaps he dimly felt that the splendour of this apparition somehow enlarged and beautified the dim, narrow horizon of his life.

Ben Lee's very livery, not to speak of his skilful and effective driving, contributed vaguely to Granfer's importance; as also did the courteous elegance and finely built form of Sir Lionel, and the manner in which, the footman having retired at a look, he handed out Lady Swaynestone and his daughter Ethel, in their velvets and furs. But Granfer was distressed to see that Ben

Lee no longer drove up with his former dash, and turned his shining steeds in the direction of the Sun with no more consequence than if he had been driving a mere brewer's dray. "Ah, Ben ain't the man he was!" he muttered, after having helped Sir Lionel and his family with the sunshine of his approbation into church.

Then came the tripping, whispering procession of the school-children, led by the rector, followed by Wax, who was involved in the double misery of new Sunday broadcloth and the absence of his cane, without which emblem of authority he was ever a lost man; and last of all came Cyril, who found time for a word and a smile for each of the group, and left them all exhilarated by his passing presence as if by a draught of wine. Then the bells ceased, the loungers entered the church, and Granfer himself, the sunshine warming his wintry white hair, walked slowly with the aid of his stout oak staff up the centre aisle to his allotted place.

He was already seated, and Cyril's musical voice had given a deeper pathos to the sentence, "Hide thy face from my sins," when Ingram Swaynestone and his sister Maude entered, rosy and fresh from their long brisk walk in the frosty morning. Ingram Swaynestone was tall and fair and strongly built, the typical young Englishman, who belongs to no class and only one country, physically perfect, good-tempered, and well-spoken, with a perfect digestion and a nervous system undistraught by intellectual burdens and riddles of the painful earth. His appearance with his pretty, fair-haired sister caused a tiny stir, almost imperceptible, like a summer breath through ripe corn, amongst the fairer portion of the congregation, with whom he was extremely popular, not only on account of his good looks and known appreciation of feminine charms, but also because of a faint delicious aroma of wickedness that hung about his name.

The devotions of several undoubtedly pious young maidens were more than once interrupted for the purpose of looking to see if he was looking, which he certainly was at every one of them in turn, when opportunity permitted; while Cyril's beautiful voice rang through the church, and Everard and Lilian, who had always loved and admired the simple majesty of the Liturgy, felt that they had never before known its real beauty.

When he read of the Massacre of the Innocents, one or two women cried. The tone in which he read that Rachel was weeping for her children and would not be comforted, poignantly reminded them that they could never be comforted for their lost little ones buried outside in the sunny churchyard. Henry, and Lilian, and Marion, and the children all gazed up with admiring affection at the beautiful young priest standing white-robed outside the chancel

at the eagle lectern, Henry thinking that the music of Cyril's voice alone surpassed any chanted cathedral service.

Often in after-years did Henry and Lilian think of that sweet Sunday morning with refreshment: the solemn beauty of the old church, with its heavy Norman arches; the sunshine stealing in, mellow and soft, through the south windows and tingeing the snowy frock of Granfer, who sat just below the chancel, and leant forward on his staff in an attitude of rapt attention; the innocent looks of the choir-boys, amongst whom was Dickey Stevens, fourth in descent from Granfer, and whom Lilian had delivered from the tyranny of the rod; and Mr. Maitland's reverend aspect, as he bent his silvered head and listened to Cyril's pure voice.

But the moment which lingered in his heart's memory till his dying day was that in which he knelt with Marion and Lilian and the villagers at the altar, and received the holy symbols from Cyril's own consecrated hands. He never forgot Cyril's pale, saint-like features and white-stoled form, the crimson from a martyr's robe in the south chancel window staining in a long bar the priest's breast and hands and the very chalice he held.

"I was so glad," Lilian said, when they were walking home together, Marion having stopped to speak to some one, "to see you there, Henry, because Cyril is often troubled about your daring speculations."

"Your father never fails to still my doubts, Lilian," he replied. "There is that in his plain, unpretending sermons, which carries conviction straight into one's heart. Sermons, as a rule, simply bore me; but Mr. Maitland's—— Well, you know, he always was my *beau idéal* of a parish priest."

Lilian's face kindled. "You are the only person who really appreciates my father," she replied. "Even Cyril does not quite know what gifts he has buried in this tiny rustic place, and willingly and consciously buried."

"I honour his intellect, but still more his heart, which speaks not only in his studiously plain sermons, but even more in his life. Cyril could take no better model."

"True; yet we all think Cyril destined to something higher," replied Lilian.

"By the way, Henry," said Cyril at luncheon, "I took your overcoat by mistake this morning. I hope it didn't put you out much; my things are all too small for you."

"That fellow is always appropriating my property, and I am too big to retaliate," growled Everard, who had forgotten all about the tight overcoat of the morning.

"Oh, I say, Cywil," broke in Lennie, "wasn't Ingwam Swayne-

stone in a wage with you for not pweaching this morning! He came to church on purpose, and he does hate going to church in the winter, he says, because the cold nips the girls' noses and makes them look so ugly."

"He doesn't mean that nonsense, Lennie," said Mr. Maitland, laughing gently. "He pays his rector a fine compliment, to say the least of it," he added.

Cyril, who was by no means making up for his morning fast, looked as if he thought Ingram was more likely to be interested in the colour of girls' noses than the quality of any sermons. Then he learnt how Ingram had called with offers of guns and horses to Everard and himself, and had been at play with Winnie, who was now in dire disgrace and condemned to go without pudding, in consequence of having made Ingram's nose bleed.

"Oh, really, mother!" he exclaimed, stroking the bright curls brushing his arms, "isn't that rather hard? Winnie did not mean it; it might have been her nose. Do you think Ingram will go without pudding, Win? Let her off, mother. I never saw a little girl behave better in church."

Whereupon Winnie was respited, after many comments from her elders on her rough ways and romping habits and constant breakages, which, it appeared, were a source of perennial disgrace to the little girl.

Cyril had very tender ways with children, and was almost as sorry for hurt things as Lilian. That very afternoon a child stumbled and fell on the way to church, and Everard saw him slip aside in his long cassock, and pick up the howling, dust-covered urchin with some merry, tender observation, wipe away the tears and blood with his own spotless handkerchief before Wax had time to bring out a denunciation on the brat's heedlessness, and comfort him finally with pence, though the parson's bell had rung, and Mrs. Wax had come to the end of her voluntary on the harmonium, and begun over again in despair.

The morning congregation had received some additions, to wit, those lazy sabbatarians who kept their day of rest so literally as to get up too late to go to church in the morning, those mothers too fatigued by performing the family toilettes to perform their own, and those who cooked the Sunday dinners and minded the babies, the majority of which latter accompanied their parents to afternoon service. It was pleasant, too, to observe that Ingram Swaynestone's piety had conquered his pain at the eclipse of feminine beauty, and that he helped to swell the little crowd.

When Cyril ascended the pulpit, he looked round the dim church with an anxious, searching gaze, and Lilian observed that

his eye rested with apprehension on the Lees' pew, and he appeared relieved when he saw Mrs. Lee standing there alone. Then he glanced in the direction of the Swaynestone servants' pew, where Ben Lee sat, glum and downcast, and Judkins, with a haggard look, held his hymn-book before his face. They were singing "Hark, the herald angels," Job Stubbs and Dickie Stevens bringing out the treble with a will, and the basses bearing thei parts manfully.

Cyril distinguished all the voices—those of Lilian and Everard, Marion and the children, Sir Lionel and his daughters, the Rectory maids, the smock-frocks, Tom and Jim Hale, Baines, the tailor, who was only an occasional church-goer, and loved to air his bass occasionally in orthodox ears—he heard even Granfer's own tremulous quaver, which had been a tenor of local celebrity, and a crowd of young memories rushed over him. He clutched the edge of the pulpit, regardless of the holly-wreath which encircled it, and pricked his fingers, and, when the last notes of "Herald angels" died away in the final quaver of an old woman half a bar behind, was silent for a few moments.

At last he recovered himself, and gave out his text—"Keep innocency, and take heed to the thing that is right, for that shall bring a man peace at the last."

He felt them all gazing up at him—Lennie and Winnie, with their innocent eyes and mouths wide open to hear "Cywil pweach;" his mother, who seldom ventured to church; Farmer Long and his family; the well-known villagers; Granfer, with his head on one side, like an old bird, the better to hear him; Ben Lee—yes, Ben Lee was looking; his father in the chancel was looking also.

Cyril turned pale; Marion caught her breath, but was soon quieted by the clear, pure notes of the young preacher's voice. He could not but pause, he said, before that congregation, and question himself deeply and sternly before he presumed to address them. They had seen him grow up among them. Many were his elders, had held him in their arms, chidden the faults of his boyhood, taught him, cared for him; many had been his playmates and companions, known his weaknesses, shared, perchance, in his escapades. How should he speak to them?

Everard disapproved of these personal remarks; and yet, when he heard the silver tones of Cyril's voice, his easy flowing sentences, and the delicacy of his allusions, he could not but be charmed. The fact was, as he reflected, that Cyril could do what no other man might, and still charm. His very faults and weaknesses were, in a manner, endearing.

He felt it, nevertheless, a great privilege, he continued, to be placed there, and he asked of their patience to hear him, for the sake of his office. Then, referring to his manuscript, he briefly touched upon the story of the martyred innocents and its lessons; and not till then did the profound snore of William Grove and other accustomed sleepers arise. Every creature had kept awake during the unaccustomed prologue, and, indeed, many of the habitual sleepers were still awake, considering it only fair to Mr. Cyril. Then the preacher spoke of the beauty of innocence, and his manner, hitherto so quiet, changed, and became more and more impassioned, till some of the sleepers woke and gazed about them with dazed wonder, as the tones of that clarion voice besought them all to keep innocency, that pearl beyond all price, that one costly treasure without which there was no light in the summer sun, nor any joy in youth and spring-time. Then he painted the tortures of a guilty conscience, the agony beyond all agonies, with such power and passion, and such a richness of poetic diction and picturesque imagery, that many a man trembled, some women sobbed, and poor Ben Lee uttered a stifled groan.

Everard grew uncomfortable. He began to fear some unseemly hysteric excitement in the little congregation, and was distressed to find Marion and Mrs. Maitland crying without reserve. Lilian's eyes were moist, but she did not cry; she was pale with a reflection of Cyril's white passion. Mr. Maitland covered his face with his surplice. He too was uneasy, and more affected than he liked to acknowledge to himself; yet he hoped that Alma's betrayer might be present and have his heart touched. The dusk was falling fast in the dim, deep-shadowed building; two or three sparks of light glowed among the white robes of the choir, and up among the dark arches Cyril's face showed haggard and agonized in the little isle of light made by the two pale tapers on each side of him in the darkness.

Long did the little congregation remember that scene: the hush of attention, broken only by an occasional sob from some woman—for most of the sleepers were awake now, and dimly conscious of the unaccustomed passion breaking the drowsy air around them—the great growing shadows in the fast-darkening church; the mass of awe-struck faces pale in the grey gloom; the rosy gleams of the scattered tapers on the choristers' surplices; and up above them, from the heart of the mysterious darkness, the one beautiful, impassioned face in the lonely radiance, and the mighty musical voice pealing forth the unutterable anguish of sin; and the light which subsequent events threw upon it only rendered it the more impressive.

"It is true, indeed," said the preacher, suddenly easing the intolerable tension of his passion, and speaking in calmer tones, "that what a holy writer has called 'the princely heart of innocence,' may be regained after long anguish of penitence and prayer, but the consequences of sin roll on in ever-growing echoes, terrible with the thunder of everlasting doom; the contrite heart is utterly broken, and the life for ever saddened and marred. Innocence once lost, my brethren, the old careless joy of youth never returns. O thou, whosoever thou be, man, woman, or even child; thou who hast once stained thy soul with deadly sin, 'not poppy, nor mandragora, nor all the drowsy syrups of the world, shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep which thou ow'dst yesterday.'

"Yet despair not, beloved brethren," he added, with flute-like softness, for his voice had again risen in agonized intensity; "there is forgiveness and healing for all. But oh! keep innocency, keep innocency; guard and treasure that inestimable, irrecoverable possession, that pure perennial source of joyous days and peaceful nights, and take heed, take watchful heed, of the thing that is right. Keep innocency, O little children, sitting here in the holy church this evening, beneath the eyes of those who love and guard you—you whose souls are yet fresh with the dew of baptism, keep, oh, keep your innocency! Keep it, youths and children, who wear the chorister's white robe! Keep innocency, young men and maidens, full of heart and hope; keep this one pearl, I pray you, for there is no joy without it! And you, men and women of mature years, strong to labour and bowed with cares and toils innumerable—you who, in the hurry of life's hot noon, have scarce time to think of heaven, with its robes and peace, yet see that you keep innocency through all! And you, standing amid the long golden lights of life's evening, aged men and women who wear the honoured crown of white hairs, watch still, and see that you guard your priceless treasure even to the last. Keep innocency, I conjure you, for that shall bring a man peace at the last! Peace, peace," he repeated, with a yearning intensity that culminated in a deep, hard sob, "peace!"

He paused, and there was dense silence for some seconds, and Everard saw that the blue brilliance of his eyes was blurred with tears; while Sir Lionel and Ingram experienced a sense of profound relief in the hope that the too-exciting sermon was at an end. The congregation rose joyously to their feet, eased of a strain that was becoming intolerable.

When Cyril had left the pulpit, his father pronounced the benediction on the kneeling crowd in his calm, sweet tones, so

restful after the storm and passion of the young preacher's richly compassed voice. But the blessing did not reach Cyril's distracted soul. Taking advantage of the shadows when he reached his place in the chancel, he glided swiftly behind the pillars, like some hurt spirit fleeing from the benison that would heal it, till he reached the vestry, where he threw himself in a chair behind a screen, and covered his face. When Mr. Maitland in due time followed the choir thither, he did not at first observe the silent, ghostly figure in the shadow; and then becoming aware of him, he left him to himself till the choristers were gone, thinking that he was praying. But on approaching nearer, he was startled to hear strong sobs issue from the veiled figure.

"My dear boy," he remonstrated, "this will never do. Too much excitement is unwholesome both for priest and people. Come, master yourself, dear lad. You are unwell; this fasting is not wise. Henry was right."

"Oh, father," sobbed Cyril, "it is not the fasting! Oh, shut the door, and let us be alone, and let me tell you all—all!"

"Come, come," said the gentle old man; "calm yourself, and tell me whatever you like later. At present we are both worn out, and need change of thought. You have a great gift, dear fellow, and I trust your words have struck home to at least one conscience——"

"They have—oh, they have, indeed!" repeated Cyril, with increasing agitation; "and that miserable conscience—— Oh, father, father! how can I tell you ——?"

"Hush! hush! This is hysteria, as Everard predicted. Say no more; I insist upon your silence. Remember where we are! Drink this water. Stay! I will call Henry;" and Mr. Maitland went quickly into the church, where Everard was yet lingering with Lilian, who always had various errands connected with the parish to transact in the porch, and beckoned him to the vestry.

Cyril did not resist his father's will any more, but sank back with a moan, half of anguish, half of relief, and listened meekly to the rough kindliness of Everard and the gentle remonstrances of his father.

"This is a pretty scene, Mr. Maitland," observed Everard, on entering the vestry. "Ill? Of course he is ill, after exciting himself on an empty stomach! The end of such goings-on as these, my friend, is Bedlam. Take this brandy, and then go quietly home and get a good sleep, and let us have no more of this nonsense, for goodness' sake."

So Cyril did as they bid him, and held his peace. Had he but acted on his heart's impulse, and spoken out then as he

wished, he would have produced sorrow and dismay indeed, but the long, lingering tragedy which was to involve so many lives would have been for ever averted.

Once, perhaps, in each crisis of our lives, our guardian angel stands before us with his hands full of golden opportunity, which, if we grasp, it is well with us; but woe to us if we turn our backs sullenly on our gentle visitor, and scorn his celestial gift! Never again is the gracious treasure offered, and the favourable moment returns no more.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Ay, you med all mark my words!" said Granfer, looking solemnly round from under the shadow of his bushy grey eyebrows. "I've a zaid it, and I'll zay it agen—ay, that I 'ool, let they go agen it as may! You med all mark my words, I zay. Queen Victòree 'll make he a bishop avore she's done wi' 'un."

"Ay," chorused the listening group, who were standing around the village oracle in the churchyard, looking phantom-like in the pale blending of sunset and moonrise; and then there was a thoughtful pause, during which Granfer's shrewd grey eyes scrutinized each face with an air of challenge.

"Ter'ble vine praiching zure-ly," observed Hale, the wheelwright.

"Vine! you med well zay that," rejoined Granfer, sternly. "I tell 'ee all, there never was praiching that vine in all Malbourne lands avore! Ay, I've a zaid it, and I'll zay it agen!"

"Made me sweat, 'ee did," observed Straun, the blacksmith, whose Sunday appearance was a caricature on his burly working-day presentment; for broadcloth of Baines's rough fashioning now hid the magnificent muscular arms and bare neck; a tall hat, too small in the head, replaced the careless, smoke-browned cap of every day; and the washing and shaving to which his face had been subjected gave it an almost unnatural pallor.

"Ye med well sweat, Jarge Straun, when you thinks on yer zins," reflected Granfer, piously.

"'Twas ter'ble vine; but darned if I knows what 'twas all about!" said William Grove, scratching his curly head with some perplexity.

"Ah! Mr. Cyril, he have a dale too much larning for the likes o' you, Willum," returned Granfer, graciously condescending to William's weaker intellect; "let he alone for that. Why, Lard

love 'ee, Willum, *I* couldn't make out more'n a quarter on't mezelf; that I couldn't, I tell 'ee! A vast o' larning in that lad's head."

"Ay, and some on it was poetry; I yerd the jingle of it," said sailor Jim.

"Master, now," continued Granfer, settling himself more comfortably against a tombstone, and leaning forward on his stick—"Lard 'a massey, any vool med unnerstand he! He spakes in his discoorses jest as though he was a zitting in front of vire atop of a cricket, and a zaying, 'Well, Granfer, and how be the taäties a-coming up?' or, 'Granfer, think o' yer zins avore you blames other volk.' Ay, that's how he spakes, bless 'un! He don't know no better, he don't. Can't spake no grander than the Lard have give 'un grace to."

"Master's a good man," said Straun, defiantly. "He've a done his duty by we this thirty year."

"Ay, he's well enough, master is," continued Granfer, in a tolerant manner; "I never had no vault to vind wi' he, bless 'un! A vine vamily he've had, too! He've a done so well as he could; but a never was no praicher to spake on, I tell 'ee."

"Ter'ble pretty what Mr. Cyril said about preaching to them as knowed him a boy," said Tom Hale. "Them esskypades, now," he added fondly, as he caressed his moustache and struck one of his martial attitudes.

"What's a esskypade, Granfer?" inquired a smock-frock.

"A esskypade," returned Granfer, slowly and thoughtfully—"a esskypade, zo to zay, is, in a way o' spaking, what you med call a zet-to—a zart of a scrimmage like;" and he fixed his glittering eye fiercely, yet half doubtfully, on Tom Hale's face, as much as to challenge him to deny it.

"Just so," responded Tom. "I said to meself, I said, 'Mr. Cyril is thinking of the set-to we had together in father's yard that Saturday afternoon; that's what he means by his esskypades.'"

"Ay, and you licked him well," added Jim, eagerly; "that was summat like a fight, Tom."

"Master Cyril had to be carried home, and kep' his bed for a week; and Tom, he couldn't see out of his eyes next day," commented the elder Hale, with pride in his brother's prowess.

"Ay, you dreshed 'un, zure enough, Tom," commented Granfer, graciously.

"He took a deal of licking, and hit out like a man," said the modest warrior, who loved Cyril with the profound affection inspired only by a vanquished foe.

Tom had fought sterner battles since. He had been through the Indian Mutiny campaign, and known the grim realities of Lucknow; but his heart still glowed, as he saw before him, in his mind's eye, the prostrate form of Cyril on the grass among the timber of the wheelwright's yard—poor, vanquished Cyril, slighter, though older, than himself, with his little shirt torn and blood-stained—and heard the applause of his comrades gathered to watch the fray.

"Well, I minds 'n, a little lad, chivying Granfer's wuld sow round meadow," struck in Stevens, who had now completed all his duties in the church and locked the door, the great key of which he carried in his hand.

"A vine, peart buoy as ever I zee," reflected Granfer, "and wanted zo much stick as any on 'em. I've a smacked 'un mezelf," added Granfer, with great dignity and importance; "ay, and I smacked 'un well, I did!" repeated Granfer, with relish.

"You was allays a good 'un to smack, Granfer," observed his grandson, the clerk, with tender reminiscences of Granfer's operation on his own person.

"Whatever I done, I went through wi' 't," returned the old man, complacently digesting this tribute to his prowess. "Ay, I've a smacked 'un mezelf, and I smacked 'un well, I did," he repeated, with ever-growing importance.

"Come along home!" said Stevens, who was waiting to lock the lych-gate. "You bain't old enough to bide in churchyard for good, Granfer."

"Ah! I bain't a-gwine underground this ten year yet," returned Granfer, shaking his head, and slowly rising from his tombstone in the blue moonlight, his breath showing smokelike on the keen air, and his wrinkled hands numbed doubly by age and the winter night. "I bain't a-gwine yet," he muttered to himself; while the group broke up in slow, rustic fashion, and they all trudged off, Tom leading the way, erect and martial, airily swinging his little cane, and stepping with a firm, even stride; Jim rolling along with a wide, swaying gait, as if there were an earthquake, and the churchyard ground were heaving and surging around him; the rustics tramping heavily after, with a stolid, forceful step, as if the ground beneath them were a stubborn enemy, to be mastered only by continued blows; and soon the grey church stood silent and deserted in the frosty moonlight, till the clock in the belfry pealed out five mellow strokes above the quiet, unheeding dead.

At that hour Ben Lee was on the point of leaving his stables and going home to tea. Judkins and he were kindling their pipes at the harness-room fire, each with a face of sullen gloom.

"It wasn't so much what he said," observed Judkins; "'twas how he said it made them all cry. He seemed kind of heart-broken about it, as though somebody belonging to him, some friend like, had done wrong."

"Do you think he was thinking of my poor girl?" asked Ben, quickly; and Judkins nodded assent.

"He always had a kind heart, had Mr. Cyril, and he thought a deal of Alma," continued Lee; "lent her good books and that."

"There was one in the church as wasn't upset, and looked as quiet as a whetstone all through—that damned doctor!" said the young man, fiercely.

"Dr. Everard? You don't think, Charles——?"

"Haven't I seen him walking in the wood with her?" he interrupted, with imprecations. "Why did he come sneaking into your house, doctoring your wife last spring, day after day without fail, and always somethink to say to Alma afterwards in another room? Answer me that, Ben Lee!"

The man was half stunned. "I'd break every bone in his cursed body," he burst out, purple with passion, "if I thought that! And the good he done my wife, too, and I that blind!"

"Blind you were, Ben Lee, and blind was everybody else. But I watched. I've seen them shake hands at the gate, and she giving of him flowers, damn him! I've seen them in the wood there, standing together, and he showing of her things through that glass of his that makes things bigger than they ought to be. Wait till I catch him, Ben, that's all! And he sitting through that sermon, and everybody crying, and even Mr. Ingram blowing his nose; he sitting as scornful and cold as any devil. There's no conscience in the likes of him!"

"Charles," cried Ben, suddenly clutching the young man's arm with a grip that brought the blood to his face, "I'll kill him!"

Ben was purple, and quivering from head to foot, and Judkins's passionate anger sank within him at the sight.

"Hush, Ben, hush!" he said; "don't you do nothing rash. Killing's murder, Ben. And that will do her no good. No, no; I'll thrash him, and you shall thrash him, and he shall be brought to book, sure enough; that's only justice."

Poor Ben dashed away his pipe, covered his face with his coat-cuff, and broke out crying.

"Lord ha' mercy!" cried the young groom, crying himself. "You do take on, Ben. Come, come, cheer up, man. Better days 'll come, and you may see her married and happy yet. Come on home, Ben, come."

And he drew him out into the solemn quiet of the winter

moonlight, and took him across the park and the meadow, and wished him good night at the door of his sorrowful home. "And mind you, Ben, don't you be hard on her," he said at parting.

"If Ben comes across him," he muttered to himself, as he strolled moodily up and down the high-road, whence he could see the Temple white in the moonlight, with its one window faintly aglow, "he'll do for him. Ben's hot, and he'll do for him, as sure as eggs is eggs." Then he vowed to himself that he would wreak his own revenge first, and, if possible, save Ben from yielding to his passionate nature. "I'll track him down like a hound!" he muttered, striking fiercely at the frosted hedgerow with the light whip he carried.

Everard, in the mean time, was serenely happy in the drawing-room at Malbourne, unconscious that he had an enemy in the world, much less that men were scheming against his honour and his life. Nay, he did not even dream that he had so much as a detractor; he loved his fellows, and was at peace with mankind.

The family were gathered in the drawing-room in pleasant Sunday idleness, save Mr. Maitland, who was visiting a sick parishioner. Cyril and Marion were side by side on a remote sofa, dreamily happy in each other's presence; Henry had mounted his microscope within reach of Mrs. Maitland, and was displaying its wonders in calm happiness for her and Lilian. Mark Antony, after careful and minute inspection of every detail of the strange apparatus, had decided that it was harmless, though frivolous, and expressed this decision by deep contented purrs and an adjournment to Cyril's knee, where he saw a prospect of long continuation and peace; and Lennie and Winnie occupied the hearthrug, and divided their attention between the dogs and the microscope.

When Lilian bent over the tube, with the strong light of the lamp touching her animated face, and her dress rustling against him, Henry thought he had never been so happy in his life. Now and again some little unexpected incident, some glance or tone, revealed to him the delicious truth that they loved each other. No one else suspected that any change had come over the fraternal relations of a lifetime; they possessed this young happiness as a secret, sacred treasure, and feared the moment when it must be revealed to the world. Everard was loth to part even with the sweet anguish of doubt which crossed his heaven from time to time; it was so delightful to watch and question every word and glance and gesture of Lilian's, and play upon them a perpetual daisy game—"She loves me, she loves me not, she loves me." Some deep instinct told him that never in all his life would he again taste such happiness as this blessed dawn of love yielded

him. As for Lilian, her manner took a little shyness occasionally in the strange fear which is the shadow of unspeakable joy.

Soon the domestic quiet was broken, but not troubled, by the irruption of Stanley and Lyster Garrett, the two sons of Northover, who liked to lounge away a Sunday evening at the Rectory, and there was much discussion of the entertainment to be given the next night to the villagers; and then the Garrett girls were brought across the park to assist in the little parliament, and kept to share the informal supper which was a Sunday feature at Malbourne.

During supper a note arrived from Swaynestone, bidding Everard come to luncheon next day to meet the great Professor Hamlyn, who had seen some paper of Everard's in a scientific journal, and expressed a wish to see the writer. This was a great pleasure to Everard, and a little responsive light in Lilian's face told him that she realized what making this man's acquaintance meant to him.

"The luncheon was a great success," Everard observed, on his return to the Rectory in the afternoon next day. "The great man was most gracious; he did me the honour of contradicting me nine times. Sir Lionel, in his gentle way, was a little horrified at his lion's roar, but saw that I was specially honoured in being selected for the royal beast's refection."

He went on to tell how the great writer, who lived in the neighbourhood, and was entertaining the professor, had been present, and had been more gracious than usual. His hair had, however, evidently not been brushed. He was questioning Sir Lionel about Cyril's sermon, in which he was interested, since he had a slight acquaintance with the Maitlands, and had already detected Cyril's bright parts. He heard of the sermon through his brother, who had been taking a country stroll the previous afternoon, and had sauntered unnoticed into the church, just at the beginning of the sermon, and returned home with the intelligence that a young genius had arisen in the neighbourhood, with a voice, manner, and power unequalled in his experience.

Ingram Swaynestone, who had accompanied Everard back to Malbourne, wondered that Cyril should stare abstractedly at the fire during this recital, as if it had no interest for him, and made some remark to him expressive of his own personal appreciation of the sermon.

"My good fellow," returned Cyril, facing about, and speaking in his easy, genial fashion, "do you suppose that I don't know that I have the 'gift of the gab,' as Everard calls it? I don't know that one need be proud of it, any more than of having one's nose placed in the middle of one's face, instead of all askew, as

befalls some people; and yet the devil is quite active enough in persuading me to be vain of it without my friends' assistance."

"It strikes me, Cyril," broke in Everard, "that you and the devil are on very confidential terms. I should have thought an innocent young parson like you the very last person the arch-enemy would select to hob-and-nob with."

"As if the Premier were to hold confidential chats with the late Nana Sahib," added Ingram, laughing.

Cyril flushed hotly, and then said, with a quietly dignified air, of which he was master when he wished to rebuke gently, "You are light-hearted, Henry; your spirits run away with you."

Upon which Everard could not resist retorting, with unabashed gravity, "I trust that yours will not run away with you, Cyril, since they are of such a questionable complexion."

"Come, you idle people," broke in Lilian; "it is time to go to the schoolroom. Are you going to be a waiter, Ingram? There is no compulsion, remember. Henry and the two Garretts are enlisted. Keppel Everard is our Ganymede; Marion and I are Hebes. In plain English, we serve the tea, and Keppel the beer."

"Since all the posts are filled, I will engage myself as general slavey," said the good-tempered Ingram, rising and following Lilian to the schoolroom, where a substantial meal was spread, and Mr. Maitland, with his curate, Mr. Marvyn, was already receiving his humble guests, who, unlike the guests of more fashionable entertainments, liked to arrive before instead of after the appointed hour, and in this case came long before all the candles were lighted, so that they depended chiefly on firelight for illumination.

Soon, however, the tables were full, men, women, and children sitting before a bounteous supply of roast beef and potatoes, while the air became oppressive with the scent of crushed evergreens and steaming food. Mr. Maitland and his curate had one table; Cyril and the Rev. George Everard presided at another; and the children's special board rejoiced in Lennie and Winnie as host and hostess.

Profound gravity prevailed, broken only by an occasional feminine titter or childish laugh, though it was evident, from the expression of Granfer's face when he came to the end of his first plate of beef, that he contemplated making a remark, probably of a jocular nature. All the mirth of the feast seemed to be concentrated in the faces of the Hebes and Ganymedes, who flew about the room with the greatest enjoyment, and took care that neither plate nor cup was empty. The two most assiduous waiters were Ingram Swaynestone and Everard, both of whom appeared

to have the gift of ubiquity, and carved with a recklessness and rapidity that astonished all beholders. It was not until the pudding was finished, and grace had been sung by the choir, that some symptoms of mirth and enjoyment began to break out among the rustic revellers, and Mr. Maitland laughed with his usual heartiness at Granfer's annual joke, a fine antique one, with the mellowness of fifty years upon it.

It was pleasant, while the tables were being cleared, and the people were grouped about the room, to see Cyril move among his old friends, saying to each exactly the right thing, in the manner exactly fitted to charm each; going up to Tom Hale, and laying his hand affectionately on his stalwart, red-coated shoulder, and calling the pleased flush into his face by the manner in which he alluded to old times, especially the immortal battle.

"I should be sorry to fight you now, Tom," he added; "or Jim either. It is well that my calling makes me a man of peace, while yours make you men of war."

"Yes, Mr. Cyril, it is all very well to be strong," replied Tom; "but what's that to a head-piece like yours?"

"They would rather have a smile from Cyril than a whole dinner from the rest of us," Everard observed to Lilian, as he paused a moment in his toilsome occupation of rearranging the room. "Just look at George," he added, pointing to his reverend brother, who was standing disconsolate and dejected in the quietest corner he could find; "he is afraid that people are enjoying themselves. He would give his head to be allowed to improve the occasion."

"He implored my father to substitute hymns and clerical addresses for our frivolous little entertainment," replied Lilian. "He asked him how he would answer for having let slip such a precious opportunity of preaching the Gospel."

"Such a gospel—

> "'The dismal news I tell,
> How our friends are all embarking
> For the fiery port of hell.'

Poor old George! What a dreary phantasmagoria life must seem to him!"

"Happily, he doesn't really believe his creed. He asked Granfer just now if he knew that he was standing on the brink of the grave. Granfer replied, 'Ay, I've ben a-standing there this ninety year and more, and I bain't, zo to zay, tired on't yet.'"

Everard went up to his brother, and accosted him. "I hope there is nothing wrong, George," he said; "you look as if something had disagreed with you."

"Thank you, Henry," he replied, "my health is, under Providence, excellent; but I grieve for the souls of these poor creatures. I have ascertained for a fact that Maitland has caused beer and tobacco to be placed in a class-room for the men. Why, oh, why will he not lead them to the only true source of comfort?"

The diners were now joined by other guests of a higher grade: Farmer Long and his family; other farmers; a fresh contingent of Garretts; and last, though not by any means least, Sir Lionel Swaynestone and his two pretty daughters.

Thereupon the choir, assisted by amateurs, struck up, "My love is like a red, red rose," and the concert began. Wax executed a solo on the clarionet of such fearful difficulty that Everard trembled lest he should break a blood-vessel; and everybody, including Mrs. Wax, who coursed frantically after his rapid runs and flourishes on the piano, breathed an inward thanksgiving when he had finished. A piano duet between Miss Swaynestone and Miss Garrett followed, and was not the less tumultuously applauded because the superior swiftness of Miss Garrett's fingers landed her at the finish two bars ahead of Miss Swaynestone, who played on to the end with unruffled composure. Nobody had taken the slightest notice of any of these performances, save Wax's, which alarmed the nervous; but now a change took place. Cyril led Lilian on to the platform, and Marion's piano prelude was drowned by the sound of heavy feet plunging in from the smoking-room, and everybody listened attentively for what was a really delicate entertainment for the ear—a vocal duet between the twins. Even Sir Lionel left his stately calm to encore the simple melody, while Granfer did serious damage to the school floor with his stick. It was not that the brother and sister sang with unusual skill, or that their voices were remarkably good, taken apart; the charm lay in the peculiar sweetness of tone resulting from the exact blending of the two.

Ingram Swaynestone grumbled in a good-tempered way at having to read after this performance, and though he read a bit of Dickens with great spirit and humour, Everard observed that the audience only listened and applauded as a matter of duty. Ethel Swaynestone was an accomplished singer, but her voice failed to please the rustic ear; while the choir glees and other amateur music were received as a matter of course. But when Cyril once more stood on the platform, and began in his rich, pure voice, "There was a sound of revelry by night," Everard was startled at the sudden hush of attention that fell on the audience, and surprised at the richness of harmony in the well-known stanzas. When Cyril repeated the line, "But hush! hark!

a deep sound strikes like a rising knell!" the rustics started and looked over their shoulders in dismay, and one susceptible matron uttered a faint shriek. "Did ye not hear it?" continued the reciter, in such thrilling tones that Mrs. Stevens, meeting the light of Cyril's blue eyes, took the question personally, and replied wildly in the negative, to the general consternation. Having brought this to a conclusion in such a manner that his unlettered audience actually saw the ball-room scene, "the cheeks all pale," the "tremblings of distress," and actually heard the sounds of approaching doom break in upon the brilliant revelry, and witnessed the hurried departure of the troops to the terrible field destined to be fertilized with "red rain," Cyril paused, to let the tumultuous encores subside; and, at last, when silence ensued, began with a plaintive sweetness, that was in strong contrast to the dramatic force and fire of the "Eve of Waterloo"—

"'I remember, I remember,
The house where I was born,
The little window where the sun
Came peeping in at morn.
He never came a wink too soon,
Or brought too long a day;
But now——'"

Here Cyril paused, with a deep sigh.

"'I often wish the night
Had borne my breath away.'"

To Everard's intense surprise, he not only saw tears all round him, but found a sensation of intense sorrow and longing for the past stealing over himself, while the pathos of Cyril's voice seemed to break his heart. He saw, as they all saw, Malbourne Rectory, and Cyril, a boy once more—gentle, happy, and full of sweet, innocent fancies; and when the latter went on, in his quiet voice, so full of melodious heart-break—

"'And where my brother set
The laburnum on his birthday:
That tree is living yet,'"

something rushed up into Everard's throat and half choked him. He knew that Cyril was thinking of a rose-tree he had planted on a far-off birthday.

"'But now 'tis little joy,'"

said Cyril, with a voice full of tears—

"'To know I'm farther off from heaven
Than when I was a boy.'"

There was no applause to this; complete and tearful silence reigned when he finished and stepped quietly down among his friends, where Sir Lionel gently rebuked him for playing so cruelly on their feelings, and added, "As I said to Ingram yesterday, such a voice and manner would sway the House;" and every one was relieved when the choir struck up, "All among the Barley."

Lilian was among the few who did not give way to tears during the recital of Hood's pathetic little poem, though Everard, who hovered near her all the evening, observed that her large, soft grey eyes were dewy wet, as was their wont when she was moved, and her face reflected all the changes on her brother's. It was not easy to get very close to Lilian, because she was fenced in, as it were, by a little ring of children, who clung to her skirts, and laid their cheeks against her beautiful, slender hands, and were perfectly happy with the privilege of touching her.

"I do not think," she said, while returning to the Rectory through the frosty moonlight with Everard, "that Cyril is farther off from heaven than when he was a boy. Indeed, it seems to me that one must grow nearer to it with every day of life, unless one deliberately turns from it."

"You are speaking from your own experience," replied Henry. "Men are different. To go through early manhood is to be drawn over a morass of temptation, into which, with the best intentions, most men sink occasionally."

"Not men like Cyril, Henry. He is so slightly weighted with flesh that he would skim dry-footed over the most quaking quagmire. I know every thought in Cyril's heart."

Everard was half inclined to endorse this opinion of Cyril. He recognized in his friend's character a certain feminine element, that *ewig weibliche* which Goethe pronounces the saving ingredient in human nature. The protecting tenderness with which he loved the bright, gentle boy, two years his junior and less robust than himself, still lived in his deep affection for the pious and intellectual young priest. Cyril's feelings were sacred to him as a woman's; he feared to sully their delicate bloom by harsh allusions to the bare facts of life. He was one of the twins, both of whom were objects of his lifelong tenderness. And Cyril had his moods, like a woman—a peculiarity not without fascination for Everard's more thoroughly masculine mind.

A soft mood was on Cyril that night. He knocked at Everard's door after every one had retired for the night, and drew a chair to his side by the fire, before which the doctor was

smoking, and, investing himself in one of Everard's coats, lighted a pipe of his own.

"The coolness with which the fellow takes my coats!" growled Everard.

"It is no matter if your coats smell of tobacco," replied Cyril, tranquilly; "I smoke so seldom that I have no smoking-coats. To-night I am restless."

"Why so pale and wan, fond lover?" laughed Everard. "Because Marion is gone back to Woodlands for two days, I suppose."

"You may laugh, Henry, but I feel more than lost without her. I am helpless, separated from the best influence of my life."

"You are a slave to your feelings; learn to master them."

"It is true," replied Cyril. "You are the best and wisest friend ever man had. I never regretted doing anything you advised. I shall always be grateful to you for making me read up for mathematical honours. I needed that discipline to steady me. I have never valued you as you deserve; only now and again it flashes upon me that what I take for granted is of superior worth. How selfish I was about letting Marion join you in the Mediterranean! You little dream how I suffered for that. Well, without you, Marion and I would have been parted for ever."

"Without Lilian."

"You and Lilian together. How selfish and weak I was! and the harm that came from it!"

"Oh, come! It's all right now; a forgotten story."

"There are things that can never be forgotten," sighed Cyril, with the pathetic intonation that had broken people's hearts in the evening. "To give way to a sin, only one sin, is like letting a little water through a dyke. A child may begin it, but once begun, the terrible consequences sweep endlessly on, a very flood of iniquity. I suppose there is nothing which has the power of multiplying itself like sin. One hideous consequence begets a hundred more hideous," continued Cyril, staring moodily at the fire, while his pipe lay extinct and neglected by his side.

"I see no pulpit, your reverence," said Everard, who was puffing away with quiet enjoyment.

Cyril turned with one of his sudden changes, and flashed a mirthful glance of his strange blue eyes on his friend, and, replenishing his pipe from the tobacco which Keppel had brought for Everard on his return from his last voyage, broke into a strain of gay affectionate chat, full of a thousand reminiscences of the school days they passed together under Mr. Marvyn's care in the quiet village.

"What a fellow you were!" exclaimed Cyril, with enthusiasm, after recalling a certain story of a Sèvres vase; and, though Everard only grunted, he looked at the graceful, animated figure before him with an affectionate adoration that made him feel it would be a pleasure to die for such a man. "I was afraid when I smashed the vase," continued Cyril, "and but for you should have hidden it. I never shall forget seeing you walk up to Lady Swaynestone and tell her that we had run up against the vase and broken it. I felt such a sneak; I had done it, and you took the blame on yourself, and got the punishment. She said no word, but delivered you such a box on the ear as made mine tingle, and sent you staggering across the room. Then her anger found words, and you bore it all."

"I never knew a ruder or more ill-bred woman," said Everard.

"I suppose you got over the box on the ear in an hour or two," continued Cyril; "but I did not. I was miserable for days, hating myself, and yet too frightened to tell the truth."

Everard here produced a yawn of cavernous intensity, and dropped his pipe in sheer drowsiness; but Maitland seemed more alert than ever, and rose in his restlessness and looked out of the window on the dark vault of shimmering stars.

"The night wanes," he said; "one day more, and the weary old year will be done—only one day."

"Ungrateful fellow!" said Everard, stretching himself till he seemed gigantic; "such a good old year. I shall be sorry to say good-bye to him, for my part."

Cyril dropped the curtain and turned to the fire, his features all alight. "Let us look forward," he said, "to the rosy future. Welcome to sixty-three, Harry; it is full of promise for us both! Good night, dear lad, and God bless you!"

And, with a warm hand-clasp, he took his leave, but turned again, lingering, irresolute; and then, with another warm hand-clasp and blessing, left his drowsy friend to his slumbers, just as the church clock was striking three.

CHAPTER IX.

THE last day of the year dawned bright and cloudless, a very prince and pearl of winter days, and Everard's heart bounded within him as he looked out on the ruddy morning, and felt it a joy merely to live.

"I shall long remember sixty-two," he thought; "it has been a good year, and to-day will crown and complete the whole. To-day I will make sure of my fate."

The wine of life never before had the sparkle and effervescence of that morning; it was almost too much for a sober mind. Had Everard been superstitious, or even introspective, he would have presaged disaster at hand. Instead of which, he rejoiced in his youth, and felt as if his body were turned to air, as he sprang down the staircase and into the sunny breakfast-room.

Mr. Maitland was late that morning, and Cyril read the simple household prayers. Everard loved this sweet custom of family prayer, remiss as he often was in assisting personally at it; it seemed so fit and harmonious for that holy incense to ascend from the altar of the innocent country home, and to-day it acquired a sort of pathos from the youth and grace of the reader. The scene lived long in his mind, irradiated by a sweet light of peace and holiness: the kneeling children and Lilian, the sunshine touching their hair; the bowed heads of the maids; the dignified bearing of the reader; the music of his voice—a voice soft now, and soothing as the murmur of the brook beneath the trees, with none of the tragic tones they knew so well. Just as Cyril was about to pronounce the closing benediction, Mr. Maitland, thinking the prayers done, entered, and, seeing how they were employed, dropped on his knees in time to receive the lad's blessing. The sight of that grey head, bent thus before the young priest's benison, touched Everard profoundly, and he felt humbled to think of his own world-stained soul by the side of these spotless creatures —priests and women and children.

"Lead us not into temptation," said Cyril's pure, rich voice, chorused by the innocent trebles and Everard's own faltering bass.

What temptation could possibly befall those guileless beings that day? What harsh dissonance could ever mar the music of those tuneful lives? he wondered. And he was glad that his own faltering petition had gone up to Heaven with those of hearts so pure, though even he could scarcely fall into temptation in that sweet spot, he thought.

Cyril announced his intention of walking into Oldport that bright morning, and Lilian, of course, was to go part of the way with him. Everard had been asked to shoot over some of the Swaynestone covers, and rather surprised Cyril, who knew that his friend liked sport, by saying that he had declined the shooting-party, and wanted to join the pedestrians.

"You had far better shoot, Henry," he said; "a mere walk is

a stupid thing for you. You have had no amusement whatever since you have been here."

"To-morrow we plunge into a vortex of dissipation," said Everard. "Will you give me the first dance, Lilian? By the way, I suppose his reverence has given up these frivolities."

"Oh, I shall dance at Woodlands to-morrow," replied Cyril. "Just two square dances with Marion, and then, I suppose, farewell to such delights."

"I cannot say that I like to see a clergyman dancing," observed his father, "though I danced myself till I was forty, and should enjoy a turn with the young people even now."

"Then, let us have a quiet carpet-dance while the boys are here," said Lilian; "just the Swaynestones and Garretts and Marion, and father shall dance with each of us in turn."

"Oh yes!" cried Everard; and Cyril chimed in with great animation, "Just one more fling for me;" and Mr. Maitland went off laughing, and saying he had nothing to do with it—they must ask their mother, and Lennie and Winnie jumped for joy, and announced that they should not go to bed before their elders, and the little *fête* was regarded as a pleasant certainty.

Cyril kept them waiting some minutes after the appointed time for starting. He had important letters to write, he said; and when at last he appeared, his face was full of care and perplexity. In the mean time, Lilian and Everard were very happy on the sunny lawn together, visiting the invalid donkey and other animals, and wandering about their old playground, past the spot where the twins used to play at Robinson Crusoe, and where Everard helped them build a hut, and recalling a thousand pleasant memories of their childish labours and sports. There was hoar-frost on the delicate branches of the leafless trees, and the sunshine was broken into a thousand jewel-like radiances by the little sharp facets of the ice-crystals. There was an unwonted sparkle also in Lilian's eyes, and a deeper glow on her cheeks than usual. The air was like wine.

The blacksmith was clinking merrily at his glowing forge as they passed along the road, and his blithe music carried far in the still air. Granfer was sunning himself outside, according to custom, ready for a chat with anybody, and commanding from his position a view of all the approaches to the village. Hale, the wheelwright, was there, getting some ironwork done, and turned with Granfer to look after the trio.

"Ay," observed the latter, shaking his head wisely, "a viner pair than they twins o' ourn you never see, John Hale, so well matched they be as Sir Lionel's bays."

"A pretty pair," replied the wheelwright; "but give me the doctor. There's muscle and build!"

"Ay," echoed Straun, between the rhythmic hammer-strokes; "a man like he's a credit to his vittles."

The young doctor's appearance certainly justified this observation, and his walk and bearing fully set off the robust manliness of his athletic frame, which was further enhanced by contrast with Cyril's slender grace. The friends were of similar height, but Henry's shoulders were higher, and made him look taller; his chest and back were far broader than Cyril's, and his well-balanced limbs were hard with muscle. The suit of grey which he wore gave him breadth, and displayed his form more fully than did Cyril's black broadcloth of severe clerical cut, which had, moreover, the well-known effect of lessening the outlines of the figure. The delicate glow which the sparkling air had called into Cyril's worn cheek was very different from the firm hue of health in Henry's honest face; and the fearless, frank gaze of his bright brown eyes, and the light-brown moustache, looking golden in the sunshine, gave him an older look than Cyril's clean-shaven features wore.

Hale observed to Granfer that whoever attacked the doctor on a dark night would find him an ugly customer, which Granfer admitted, adding that Cyril's strength all went to brain-power, in which he was supreme. Lilian also observed Henry's athletic appearance in contrast with her brother's slight build, and then she remembered how the friends but the day before had been playing with the children in the hall, and the fragile-looking Cyril had given his muscular friend a blow so clean and straight and well-planted that the doctor had gone down like a ninepin before it, to the great amusement of the children and satisfaction of Everard.

Farmer Long was driving into Oldport in his gig, and there beside him sat Mr. Marvyn, charmed to see his three pupils together. "I shall not see you again, Henry," he said regretfully, "unless you stay over Sunday. I only came back for the entertainment yesterday. I have a parson's week to finish. Cyril I shall see again." And so they parted with regret, since Everard was greatly attached to his old tutor, who had encouraged and developed his taste for natural science, and upheld him in his choice of a profession. "And I wanted to tell old Marvyn about my germ theory," Everard said, as the gig disappeared.

"You will be able to tell the whole world soon," replied Lilian, to whom the theory had been confided and explained that very morning.

"Not yet," said Everard; "it takes years of patient study and experiment to verify a scientific theory."

"Old Hal always was a patient fellow," Cyril observed. "Do you remember the rows about his dissections in his bedroom, Lill?"

Lilian replied that she remembered the odours, and they all laughed over the old schoolroom jokes and catastrophes, and were very happy as they climbed the hillside by a field-path, leaving the road below them. Afterwards Everard remembered the rare and affectionate expression, "Old Hal." And now in the bright sunshine he was pleased to see Cyril so like his old self, careless, cordial, and light-hearted, all the asceticism and sadness put away; ambition, toil, and care completely forgotten. He knew that Cyril loved Marion truly, and would be happy with her, and yet it struck him that morning that his strong, half-instinctive affection for his twin sister touched a yet deeper chord in his nature. Now that Marion was away, there was a greater ease about the twins; each seemed to develop the other's thoughts in some mysterious manner. They laughed to each other, and walked hand-in-hand like children, seeing everything through each other's eyes—the still, sunny winter fields and brown woods stretching away to the sea, the flocks of weird white sea-gulls, the occasional rabbit or pheasant starting up before them, the larks, silent now, fluttering over the grassy furrows, the bright berries in copse and hedgerow, the sheep peacefully munching the mangolds a solitary shepherd was cutting for them in a lonely field. They called each other Cyll and Lill, abbreviations none else ever used; they contradicted each other as they never dreamed of contradicting anybody else.

Everard walked along, sometimes by their side, sometimes behind them, as the nature of the path obliged, and listened to them and loved them. The twins were never so delicious to him as when together in his familiar presence, of which they seemed to make no account. So long as those two could meet together thus, an immortal childhood would be theirs, he thought; age could never rob the beautiful bond between them of its bloom. Presently they quarrelled. Lilian sat on a felled tree in the woods through which they were passing; Cyril leant up against a tree; and Everard looked on with amusement, and loved them all the more in their childishness.

"Oh, you babes in the wood!" he cried at last; whereupon Cyril flashed upon him one of his droll glances, and laughed.

"Come, Lill," he said, "I forgive you this time."

Absolute harmony and utter unconsciousness of past anger was established between them on the instant, and Everard was

amused to hear them plunge straightway into a grave discussion upon the limits of free-will.

They were now high on the crest of the hill, and could see the lovely stretches of down sweeping away to the unseen sea on one side, while on the other the Swaynestone lands sloped down with wood and park and farmstead till they merged in the horizon, which was broken here and there by tiny blue bays of inland sea on the north.

There was so sound; all the song-birds, even the robin, were hushed by the frost, and the whole landscape lay silent before them, folded in the awful purity of winter sunshine. The shadows in the hills and woods were blue, and distant objects looked immensely far in the violet haze of the winter morning. Here they paused, deep in their argument, and looked down over the tranquil woods and saw the white front of Swaynestone House gleaming in the sun.

Down in a low-lying fallow field there were some black specks motionless in the furrows; suddenly they rose in a black cloud of wings, and there were a hundred silver flashes against the belt of coppice bordering the field. Higher still the cloud rose, and swift gleams of black and silver flashed in rhythmic sequence against the pure blue of the sky, and the weird wail of the plover was heard faintly, as the flock floated in a dazzle of white bodies and black wings over the coppice till they reached another field, into the furrows of which they dropped motionless. While Everard and Lilian were watching the plovers, they did not observe that Cyril plunged into the wood behind them and put his hand into the hollow of a tree.

"I was looking for a squirrel's nest," he said, strolling back again. "Listen; I will imitate a chaffinch."

It was a trick they used to practise when parted from each other in the woods, and they looked down over the roof of the Temple, which lay among the trees below them, and thought of their old rambles for nuts and blackberries, when little Alma would often join them and tell them where to find heavy-laden boughs and brambles. Suddenly from among the trees rose the call of another chaffinch, exactly corresponding to Cyril's.

"Some children at play," said Cyril, carelessly; "Lennie and Winnie, perhaps. They were going to Swaynestone to slide. I must get on, Everard; I have a lot to do in Oldport."

"'Jog on, jog on, the footpath way,
And merrily hent the stile-a:
A merry heart goes all the day,
Your sad tires in a mile-a,'"

Everard sang out in his deep voice, as the trio continued their walk at a mended pace.

After another mile through hanging woods of beech and sycamore, they descended a hill and climbed another crested with coppice, through which they passed, brushing the heavy hoar-frost from the dead leaves and twigs as they went, and pausing for Lilian to show them the haunt of a little wren in a bank. The tiny bird, attracted by some crumbs sprinkled on her muff, came cautiously out, climbed up her arm, pecked its dainty meal, and suffered itself to be raised on the muff to the level of her face, in which it gazed confidingly, even venturing to peck at a little stray fluff of a curl which stole over her neck. Everard and Maitland stood apart and watched this pleasant comedy.

"You had the same power over animals as Lilian," Everard observed to Cyril. "What is its secret, I wonder?"

"There are three moral factors," replied Cyril: "perfect self-control, that warm and intelligent affection which we call sympathy, and innocence. Lilian is the most guileless human being on the face of this earth. There must also be some physical attraction, I suspect—some mesmeric or electric power, of which we know little."

"But surely you possess the three moral factors; how is it you have lost your power? Lilian was saying only last night that the good draw nearer heaven with increasing years, and you, whose life has been not merely stainless, but austere——"

"Henry," interrupted Cyril, in his most pathetic voice, "I am a *man!*"

Lilian had replaced her tiny friend at its house-door, and now joined the young men, who went on their way, Everard struck and startled by the heart-broken accent Cyril laid on the word *man*, and wondering if the morbid tone he had of late detected in the young priest's mind did not almost verge on insanity.

At the end of the coppice through which they were passing was a stile standing on a steep bank, which led by rough steps down into the high-road, and here they parted, the twins once more falling into discord, each offering Henry as a companion to the other, and declining to selfishly appropriate him, until he laughingly suggested that he was no mere chattel, but a being endowed with will; also that his will decided to take the homeward path with Lilian—a decision which evidently satisfied Cyril, who sprang down the steep bank, and turned, on reaching the road, to the stile—over which the other two leaned—with a laughing face, and lifted his hat in his own graceful manner. They gazed after the light, well-carried figure for a moment or two, little imagining how

all the light died out of the bright young face when it turned from them, what a weight of trouble lined the clear brow and drew down the corners of the delicate mouth, and added ten years, at least, to his apparent age, and then they began to retrace their steps through the wood.

"It is like old times," Lilian observed. "Cyril and I are growing old and wise, Henry; we are seldom like that now. We seem to grow apart, which we must expect."

"'The old order changeth, giving place to new,'" quoted Everard. "The new may be better, but one does not like to part with the old," he added falteringly, after a pause.

"The old—was good," replied Lilian, rather absently; and the perfect self-command of which her brother had spoken suddenly deserted her, with the consciousness that the story of her life and love was approaching a crisis, and the two walked on in silence.

Everard's bright spirits seemed to have flown onwards in the wake of Cyril, his heart sank down like a thing of lead, and a dreadful vision of all his sins and shortcomings, his weaknesses and failings, rose ghastly and oppressive before him. Henry Everard appeared to him as the merest rag of a man—the most complete failure that ever issued from the workshops of nature and education. He stole a glance at Lilian, walking with her light step and airy carriage by his side; a sweet picture of stainless womanhood, her cheek flushed with purest rose by exercise, her eyes cast down contrary to their wont, her hair touched into golden tints by the sunlight, and the outline of her form traced clearly against a background of frosted hazel boughs, and his spirit died within him. What had he to offer her? How could he ever dare? And yet—— Lilian turned under the stress of his ardent gaze, and met his eyes for one swift moment; then her looks resumed their commerce with the mossy, frost-veined path, and a rich rush of crimson flooded her face.

"Lilian," began Henry, breathlessly, "we have been great friends all our lives."

"Yes," replied Lilian, regaining her natural mental poise; "Cyril and I always appropriate each other's goods."

"Supposing Cyril out of the question," he added hastily, "would you not care for—value my friendship? In short, am I not your own personal friend? Don't you care a little for me for my own sake, Lilian?"

"Indeed I do, dear Henry," she replied, a little tremulously. "There is no friend for whom I—whom I value more highly. That is—yes, we are real friends."

"You were always dear to me, very dear—as dear as Marion herself," continued Henry; "but you have become the dearest of all since I scarcely know when—the very dearest human being on earth. Oh, Lilian, the truth is that I love you with all my heart! I have loved you long; I cannot tell when I began."

"That is not the important question," returned Lilian, with a little smile dawning about her lips and eyes. "The question is, how long do you mean to go on?"

The same quaint, half-humorous, half-pathetic expression which so often lighted Cyril's pale blue eyes now gleamed from Lilian's gray orbs, moistened with the sweet dew which so frequently enhanced their lustre, and even in that passionate moment Henry observed this, and thought how closely his love and his friendship were bound together, and realized that Cyril was dearer than ever to him now that Lilian was his.

The answer to Lilian's playful earnest was the old immemorial assertion of lovers, repeated with endless delightful iteration, long drawn out with Heaven knows how much unnecessary sweetness. The old unvarying song the birds sing every spring, with a fresh charm that never cloys, though the white-headed man heard it in his childhood, and in the days when he too swelled the many-voiced marriage-hymn which ascends perpetually from the youth and strength of earth; the old eternal song which is yet the freshest sound that ever falls on the ear of youth, and fills it with a sweet bewildered surprise; the theme which changed Eden from a prison to a home;—this delicious melody was sung over again in the wintry woods that day, when all the birds were hushed by the frost, and the earth lay still in its winter trance.

The singing of this pleasant duet took a long time, and the low midwinter sun passed its meridian and travelled some distance on its westward way, while they strolled slowly on with many pauses, slowly enough to chill blood not warmed by the current of vital flame which young Love sends through the veins, until they reached the spot above the Temple, where they watched the plovers' flight in the morning. They paused there.

At that moment a delicate music floated up from the valley, the well-known, cheery chiming of the waggon-bells. Nearer and nearer the golden harmony swelled, stronger and stronger the fairy peals waxed, as the team approached on its way along the high-road to Oldport, till the soft chimes came tumbling in the full power of their sweet turbulence upon the clear, still air.

"Those are our wedding-bells," said Everard, as they passed on and let the melodious clashing die away behind them in the distance. "It is a good omen."

CHAPTER X.

THE irony of fate will often have it so that when life gains its culminating point of happiness, it is but one degree from the darkest hour of overthrow; just as the blossom has reached its sweetest bloom, the blighting frost comes, and all is over. When Everard and Lilian exchanged the promise whose sweetness was to live through so many dark and lonely years, they little dreamed that any peril was near them in the silent wood. They saw no crouching figure trembling behind the hazel bushes; they did not guess that any eye, save those of the wild creatures of the wood, witnessed their betrothal; and they went on their way rejoicing, making plans for the happy future they were to spend side by side.

When Ben Lee went home to dinner that day, the young groom, Judkins, accompanied him, as he often did now, finding a strange solace to his own grief in that of the troubled father, and pleased that the old man turned to him for consolation. He usually left Lee at the door, but on this occasion Mrs. Lee came out and beckoned him in.

"She's gone to meet him," she said excitedly. "She made believe to go and gather a bit of brushwood in the garden, and she's off up the hill to the wood. He must have passed an hour ago, and there was the whistle of a chaffinch for signal. I heard her whistle back, the deceitful faggot, though she thought I was safe out of the way, and she's been watching for an opportunity ever since. Straight up the hill she went, Lee, not twenty minutes gone."

While Mrs. Lee was speaking, the two men had followed her through the house, and now stood in the back garden, whence they could see the whole slope of the hill, with its woody crest traced clear against the blue midday sky. Beneath this crest the trees had been cleared in a straight, broad strip about the breadth of the little garden.

"Look here, Ben!" cried Judkins, seizing the arm of Lee, who was striding rapidly through the garden, and was about to ascend the treeless slope; "don't you do nothing rash, now."

Lee's face was purple, and he shook the younger man off with a muttered oath, when the latter once more caught him by the arm, and pointed upwards, with a cry.

"I knew it; I always knew it. The damned scoundrel!"

Just within the shadow of the wood, which partly screened them, were two figures, the inner and less seen, that of a woman in dark winter clothing; the outer, that of a man in a suit of grey.

The light hazel twigs impinged but slightly on the latter figure, so that its outline was distinctly seen, and the face itself was even visible sideways for a moment. The female figure, on the contrary, with the face hidden in the other's arm, and its dark outlines less striking by their colour, could only be guessed at. The vision lasted but a moment; the figures moved on over the woodland path. The hazels were denser there, and the path turned into the wood, so that the pair were gradually hidden, and soon completely vanished from sight.

"I'm witness, mind," Judkins muttered, while Lee groaned aloud. "You and me saw him go through the village this morning in those grey clothes and that hat."

So saying, the young man turned and went rapidly back, avoiding the garden, and plunging into the shadow of the trees which bordered it on either side, while Lee toiled up the hill. He had not gone far before Alma appeared at the spot where the hazels grew thin, and issued from the wood. She started slightly when she saw her father, but soon regained her composure, and advanced towards him.

"What were you doing in the wood?" he asked harshly.

"I only went up for a little fresh air this fine day," she replied gently.

"Went up to hear the birds sing, perhaps," he continued, with savage sarcasm.

"There are no birds singing now," said Alma, sadly. "Even the robin is silent in the frost."

"Ay, and the chaffinch. Who were you speaking to a minute ago?"

"Nobody," she replied, looking surprised.

"That's a damned lie, Alma!"

"I have spoken to no human being but you and mother this week past," said Alma, in a tone of weary apathy.

They had reached the garden now, and Alma went in, scarcely hearing the imprecation that burst from her maddened father's lips.

Lee remained behind her; then re-ascended the hill and picked up a little scrap of paper he had seen Alma tear in halves and drop when she thought herself unobserved. He pieced it together, and read, written in a disguised, backward-slanting hand, "At dusk to-night. The old spot. Important."

"Oh, Alma!" he cried; "my pretty Alma! my only child!" Then he turned back, his brow darkening as he went, till the momentary tenderness was quite effaced, and he muttered fiercely beneath his breath, "I'll kill him! I'll kill him!"

It was late when the unconscious lovers reached home. The

bell was ringing for luncheon, and Mark Antony was sitting on the doorstep, looking very cross at his mistress's delay; for he was a cat of regular habits, and particularly disliked waiting for meals. He received Lilian rather distantly, accepted Henry's caress with haughty disdain, and then boxed Snip's ears for barking inopportunely.

"Oh, I say, Henry!" cried Lennie, who was bounding into the dining-room with fresh-brushed hair and clean collar, "ain't you in a mess?"

Henry had slipped on a damp bank by a stream, in trying to gather some ivy coloured crimson and gold for Lilian, and a great brown-and-green stain showed strikingly on the knee of his grey suit. In two bounds he was in his room, and in three seconds out of the stained suit and into another, consisting of a black coat and lower garments of the same tone of grey as those discarded. The grey suit was folded neatly and placed on a chair; and he appeared at the table in less than five minutes in that perfect neatness and cleanliness which so especially distinguish the English gentleman.

No one observed his change of dress, though everybody had noticed the morning's grey suit. It was rather light in colour for the season, according to the fashion of that day, and had commended itself to Everard from the sense of cleanliness that light colours always afforded him. Lilian, indeed, observed that the grey coat was replaced by a black one, and, in speculating afterwards on the subject, she came to the conclusion that the black had probably been assumed for indoor wear, as being cooler than the thick frieze.

Marion appeared at luncheon, having dropped in on her way to Oldport, where she had errands in connection with the New Year's ball at Woodlands. She made a charming little face of disappointment at the non-appearance of Cyril; but the disappointment by no means spoilt her appetite, and she kept them all alive by her sprightly conversation and playful, endearing ways. She petted Mr. Maitland in a most enchanting manner; teased the children and the cat; was impertinent to Lilian when gently rebuked for these misdemeanours; snubbed her brother, according to her usual custom; and was very tender in the little cares she lavished on Mrs. Maitland. Her vivacity, and the bright, warm-coloured style of her beauty, and the aërial lightness of her form made a good foil to Lilian's repose and gentle dignity, the quieter tones of her colouring, and the more majestic development of her figure.

Everard regarded his sister as a charming wayward child, loved

her little rebellious ways, and put up contentedly with all her naughtiness. He was six years her senior, and had been the youngest of the family till her birth, which cost their mother her life; and then the orphan baby became the object of his tenderest care, and he soothed away his own sorrowful sense of orphanhood by hovering over the tiny sister's slumbers, and amusing her waking moments by all kinds of childish devices. It was partly for the baby's sake that he was never sent to school; partly also in obedience to the request of his dead mother, who judged, from her experience of the elder boys, that the benefits of public schools were overbalanced by their contaminations and temptations. All his life he had been Marion's devoted slave, and, like other despots, she received his devotion with a satisfaction not unmingled with contempt.

"What on earth is Cyril doing in Oldport all day?" Marion asked. "What business can he possibly have?"

"Upon my word, I cannot imagine," replied Mr. Maitland, who had not considered the subject before.

And Marion's question set Everard thinking. Cyril was not likely to make many purchases in the little country town; his affairs were in the hands of London lawyers; he could not want money; he had no friends there; in short, it was very odd that he should spend the day in a little market town on business that could not be postponed, and so miss the partly expected visit of Marion.

Marion, however, carried Mr. Maitland off with her after luncheon, on his remembering that he had certain commissions to execute, and Lilian drove to Swaynestone to pay her long-promised call on Lady Swaynestone, and advise her about her charities according to her request. She had a thousand things to do, and was much troubled that she could not visit a certain Widow Dove, who lived in a lonely cottage on the down, that afternoon, and carry her a little present of money. So Henry, finding that he could not be allowed to accompany Lilian to Lady Swaynestone's, since the ladies wished to discuss business, offered to be Lilian's almoner, and was eagerly accepted.

He saw Lilian and the children off in the pony-carriage, and then betook himself to writing some letters in the room called Lilian's; and, having done this, he remembered that Lilian had lamented having no time to frame and hang the photograph of Guercino's picture, and did this for her, the frame having been already furnished by the village carpenter.

In the mean time, at about three o'clock, Cyril appeared in the drawing-room, where Mrs. Maitland was lying on her couch. He

had finished his business, got some luncheon at Oldport, and been picked up just out of the town by Farmer Long, who drove him home in his gig, he said. Then, after ten minutes' chat with his mother, he went to his room, telling her that he wished to get a sermon ready for the next Sunday, when he was to be at work again, and requesting that he might not be disturbed till dinner.

All this Mrs. Maitland told Everard, when he looked into the drawing-room a few minutes later.

"I begged him to put off his sermon-writing till another day," she said, "for he looked woefully haggard and weary; but I could not persuade him. He says he feels so burdened until he has got his Sunday's sermons off his mind. Just like his father. He always does his sermons on Monday, if he can, and feels a free man for the rest of the week."

"It is rather odd," Everard observed, "that Cyril should spend so much time in writing his sermons; for he is supposed to be an extempore preacher."

"Last Sunday's sermon was certainly extempore," his mother replied; "he had some manuscript, but scarcely referred to it more than once. I wonder if I am a very foolish old woman, Henry, for thinking that Cyril has a really singular gift in preaching? His voice appears to me to be something quite out of the common. And I have heard John Bright's oratory, and Gladstone's, and D'Israeli's, the best preachers in our own Church, and those brilliant Roman Catholics who attracted such crowds to Notre Dame."

"I think, Mrs. Maitland," replied Everard, who was rather distraught in his manner, since he was nerving himself to introduce the topic of his engagement, "that Cyril will be reckoned the greatest preacher in the Church of England."

Then some people called, and Everard made his escape as soon as he decently could, and at about a quarter to four he started on his walk to Widow Dove's with a light heart. His road was, as far as the wood above the Temple, the same as that he had pursued so happily with Lilian an hour or two before, and it filled him with unspeakable rapture to recall the delightful incidents in his morning walk as he went, so that he was dreamy and unobservant, and scarcely spoke to the people he met on his solitary ramble, a thing very unusual with him.

The sun was declining redly and with great pomp of cloud scenery in the west—a glorious ending, he thought, of the happiest of happy years; and that was the only clue he had to the time of his starting, when referring in memory to this fatal walk, since he omitted, in his dreamy abstraction, to look at his watch, though

he was naturally so precise in his habits, and had such a keen sense of the passage of time.

When he reached Widow Dove's lonely dwelling, he found it cold and dark, the door shut, and no smoke issuing from the chimney; the widow and her daughter were evidently gone away for a day or two. He felt a sort of eerie shiver at the darkness and gloom of the solitary homestead, though he little dreamt that his fate or the fate of those he loved could be influenced by a circumstance so trifling as the emptiness of a secluded cottage.

Then he turned his face homewards in the gathering dusk, choosing another way from that by which he came, by that strange fatality which pursues doomed men, and strode gaily and swiftly along over the open down, every dimple and hollow of which were familiar to him from boyhood. Some stars were out now, sparkling keenly in the clear, frosty sky, in which the moon had not yet risen. Over hedge and ditch, and through copses, and round plantations Everard sped blithely, until he approached the high-road leading to Malbourne. Here his pace slackened, and he listened carefully for the sound of Long's waggon-bells, which he thought would carry far in the frosty stillness.

But there was no repetition of the fairy peals which rang so blithely in the morning, and he got as far as the wheelwright's corner without having heard them. Grove, the waggoner, was to bring him a parcel from Oldport, a little parcel that he feared might be forgotten if he did not intercept it. Here he met Granfer, toiling slowly along on his way to spend the evening at Hale's, whose wife was one of his numerous descendants. Had Granfer heard the team go by? he asked.

"No, I ain't a yeard 'em since this marning, zo to zay; not as I knows on, Dr. Everard," Granfer replied, with his usual circumlocution. "I 'lows I yeared 'em's marning, zure enough. They was a-gwine into Oldport, as I hreckons, as you med zay zumwheres about noon or thereabouts. No, I 'lows I ain't a-yeared nor a bell zince that there; not as I knows on, I ain't."

After some further conversation, Everard strolled slowly on in the direction of Long's farm, full of anxiety about his precious packet, which he knew would fade. Near Long's he heard that the team had returned some time before, and his packet had been sent to the Rectory.

Striking across the fields, he returned in the deepening night, without going through the village, and, meeting with a little delay in consequence of an old gap having been recently stopped in a fence—a good stiff bullfinch—he gained the Rectory at about six o'clock, thus missing, to his disgust, the charmed hour of tea.

There, when he entered, was the precious little box on the hall table, and he caught it up, and was going to unfasten it in his room, when Winnie waylaid him at the foot of the stairs, eager for a romp, which romp resulted in Winnie, while being tossed high in air, throwing back her head and striking him a tremendous blow in the eye with it, so that he set her hastily down with an exclamation of pain, and put his hand to his face.

"You've done it now, Winnie; blinded me," he said.

"Oh, Henry, I am so sorry!" sobbed Winnie. "And they won't let me go to Long's tea-party to-morrow; it was only on Sunday I made Ingram Swaynestone's nose bleed."

"Never mind, darling," said Everard, kissing and soothing her; "it was not your fault at all."

Then he promised to let no one know of his black eye, and to do his best to cure it; to which intent he procured raw meat from the kitchen, and went to his room, taking Winnie with him to help him unpack the parcel, which contained some choice white flowers. These he bid the child take to her sister at once, while he shut himself up, and tried to subdue the rising inflammation in the bruised eye to the best of his ability.

He was anxious to avoid such an ornament as a black eye on his own account, as well as the child's, since a black eye does not improve a man's appearance at a ball, nor is it in keeping with popular ideas of a newly accepted lover. So he doctored himself till it was time to get ready for dinner, and then, seeing the grey suit lie on the chair as he had placed it in the morning, he sponged the green stain away from it. Scarcely had he done this when he saw other stains, some still wet, and, procuring some fresh water, sponged these also. The water was red when he finished.

"Blood," he thought, being well used to such stains. "Did I cut myself anywhere, I wonder?"

He did not, however, waste much thought on this trivial incident, but sponged the garments clean in his tidy way, and left the crimsoned water in the basin, where it subsequently gave Martha, the housemaid, what she described as a turn. Then he made his appearance in the drawing-room, carefully avoiding the lights, and gave rather a lame account of himself since his return from the fruitless errand to Widow Dove's. He was rewarded for his labour on Lilian's behalf, by the sweetest smile in the world, and was enchanted to observe at dinner that Lilian wore one of the white roses from his bouquet in her dress.

Cyril did not appear at dinner; he sent word that one of his bad headaches had come on, and begged that he might be undisturbed for the night.

"Poor dear Cyril!" said Lilian; "it is so hard for a man to have headaches. His are like mine; nothing but quiet heals them."

"Their very headaches are twins," Mr. Maitland observed. "Why, Henry," he added, "what have you done to your eye? You appear to have been in the wars, man."

Winnie, who was standing by the fire, here threw an imploring glance at Henry, and completely scattered what few talents he had ever possessed for dissimulation.

"I—I—I knocked my head against something in the dark," he stammered; "I—it was purely accidental."

"What a nasty blow!" said Lilian, observing it; "you will have a black eye. What a pity! Ah, sir! perhaps that accounts for your rudeness to me this evening."

"My rudeness, Lilian? What can you mean?" asked Henry.

"Yes, your incivility to me, and also to Mark Antony, who was actually doing you the honour of running to meet you—the haughty Mark himself. Think of that!"

"I can only apologize to both with the deepest humility," he replied, stroking the petted animal, who was dining with his usual urbane condescension at Lilian's side; "but indeed I am quite innocent, having seen neither you nor puss since you started for Swaynestone."

Then Lilian told how at tea-time, on passing from the back regions towards the drawing-room, accompanied by her usual body-guard, Mark Antony, she had seen Henry run across the back hall towards the staircase; had called to him about Widow Dove's commission; while the cat, with a mew of delight, had bounded after him. He had rushed on, however, in the dusk, a grey, ghost-like figure, and flitted up the stairs to his room, followed by Mark, whom he expelled ignominiously, shutting the door after him.

"You must be under some delusion," replied Henry, utterly confounded. "I saw no cat when I came in."

"It was growing very dark," Lilian said, "and Martha was late in lighting the hall-lamp to-night, for which, indeed, I afterwards rebuked her."

"The lamps were lighted——" Henry began, and then stopped at the sight of Winnie, who was gesticulating in an agonized manner behind her mother's chair. "This sounds extremely ghost-like," he added; "I hope it bodes me no misfortune. It must have been my wraith, Lilian."

"It sounds rather eerie, certainly," interposed Mr. Maitland. "Lilian dear, I hope you are not going to take to seeing people's wraiths. It gives me the most fearful jumps to think of."

"I am creeping from head to foot," added Mrs. Maitland, laughing; "and on the last night of the year, too. Dr. Everard, what prescriptions have you for young ladies who take to ghost-seeing?"

"I am going to ask you for another cutlet, sir. My appetite will convince you that I, at least, am no illusion, but a substantial reality," said Henry, instead of replying.

"There never was any deception about you, Harry lad," returned Mr. Maitland, cordially; "you were always real."

The evening which ensued ought to have been very happy, but somehow it was not. A vague uneasiness was in the air; Cyril's absence created a void in the family party, and the children, who were permitted to stay up for the New Year, grew tired, and consequently tiresome. Mr. Maitland, when he recovered from his after-dinner nap, which was unusually long, read them one of Dickens's Christmas tales, and although it was pleasant to Henry to sit by Lilian and watch her beautiful white hands at their busy task of embroidering some silken flowers, he was not sorry when, the servants having been assembled in the drawing-room, a pleasant clinking of glasses was heard, and, the usual ceremonies of toasting and hand-shaking gone through, the bells began drowsily chiming the Old Year out from the belfry hard by.

They all went into the hall then, Mr. Maitland opened the door wide to let the New Year in, and Lilian and Henry, hand-in-hand, gazed trustfully out into the starry sky to meet it, their hearts full of the sweetest hopes.

When Henry went to his own room soon after, he could not refrain from opening Cyril's door, which adjoined his own, and just looking in, thinking he might be asleep. He pushed the door very softly, and introduced his head. Only a faint light was burning from one candle, and by this dim ray he saw Cyril kneeling half-dressed before a picture of the Crucifixion. His face was hidden in his hands, and he was sobbing in a low, suppressed way.

Henry shut the door softly, and stealthily withdrew, vexed at his own intrusion. "That is not the way to cure the headache," he mused, half awed at the manner in which the young priest received the New Year. Yet who could venture to say that watching and fasting and tearful contrition were not eminently fitting, in one set apart for holy functions, at such a season? "I wonder," Everard continued to speculate, "what infinitesimal peccadilloes the poor lad is mourning with all that expenditure of nervous energy?" Then he thought of his own weaknesses and shortcomings, and felt pitchy black in contrast with a soul so white.

CHAPTER XI.

THE wheelwright's house stood just on the crest of the steep little hill which carries the pilgrim down into the village of Malbourne with a rapid acceleration of pace, and which ends where the four roads meet. The Sun Inn stands at one corner, facing the incoming pilgrim cheerfully on its left; and opposite this tidy hostelry stands a sign-post apparently waving four gaunt arms distractedly, and seeming to bid the wayfarer pause beneath the thatched roof of the little inn, whether his journey's end lie onwards over the high-road, or oblige him to turn aside through the village by church and Rectory.

On the traveller's right, facing him, is a cottage, and facing that is the wheelwright's yard, full of timber and waggons half built or broken. The wheelwright's dwelling, standing above the grassy yard, commands a fine view of the village nestled under the down and the sweeping parklands of Northover on one side, and on the other looks over an undulating landscape to the sea. It is a cheery little house, pleasantly shaded by a couple of shapely lindens in front, and close to the high-road, upon which its front windows and deep-timbered porch give.

On New Year's Eve the wheelwright's windows were all lighted up, and there was even a lantern at the little front wicket, which gazed out like a friendly eye, as if to bid people enter and make merry within, and threw a yellow fan-shaped radiance on the steep road without. The porch door was open, and disclosed a passage lighted by a candle in a tin sconce adorned with holly. On one side, an open door revealed the chill dignities of the best parlour, which not even a blazing fire and abundance of holly-berries could quite warm.

On a haircloth sofa in this state apartment sat Mrs. Hale, of Malbourne Mill, and Mrs. Wax, the schoolmaster's wife, both exceedingly upright, and both holding a handkerchief of Gargantuan dimensions over the hands they crossed in their laps. Opposite, in a horsehair arm-chair, sat an elderly lady in a plum-coloured silk gown, gold chain, and a splendid cap, also very upright, and also holding a Gargantuan handkerchief. This was Mrs. Cave, the wife of a small farmer in the neighbourhood.

Each lady's face wore a resigned expression, mingled with the calm exultation natural to people who know themselves to be the most aristocratic persons in a social gathering. Each realized that *Würde hat Bürde*, and felt herself equal to the occasion;

each paused, before making or replying to an observation, to consider the most genteel subjects of conversation and the most genteel language in which to clothe them.

"Remorkably fine weather for the time of year, ladies," observed Mrs. Hale, soothing her soul by the pleasant rustle her shot-silk gown made when she smoothed it, and regretting that her gold chain was not so new-fashioned as Mrs. Cave's; while, on the other hand, she experienced a delicious comfort in meditating on the superiority of her brooch, which was a large flat pebble in a gold frame.

"Indeed, mem, it is most seasonable, though trying for delicate chestes," returned Mrs. Cave, with her finest company smile, after which a pause of three minutes ensued.

"Some say the frost is on the breek," continued Mrs. Hale, wondering if it would be genteel to ask Mrs. Cave how much her cap cost. She had an agonized suspicion that it would not.

After five minutes, Mrs. Wax, whose comparative youth and lower rank occasioned her some diffidence, took up her parable in the following genteel manner:—"Her ladyship was observing this marning——"

But what her ladyship was observing was never revealed to man, since at that moment, Widow Hale, the host's mother, came bursting in, stout, healthy, and red-faced, her cap slightly awry, and called out in her hearty, wholesome voice—

"Well, now, my dears, and how are *you* getting on? I'm that harled up with so many about, I ain't had a minute to ast after ye all. Mary Ann, my dear, give me a kiss do, and a hearty welcome to you all, and a kiss all round, and do make yourselves at home. Now, is the tea to your liking? This best teapot ain't much at drawing. I ain't much of a one for best things myself; well enough for looking at, and just to say you've got them, but give me work-a-day things for comfort. There ain't above half the company come yet, and Mary Ann upset about the pies for supper. Do just as you would at home, and you will please me. If there ain't dear old Granfer coming in, bless his heart! Come in, Granfer, and kindly welcome."

And so saying, the kind soul bustled out, and relieved Granfer of his hat, while her daughter-in-law, the actual hostess, came to do the honours of the best parlour, bringing in three more female guests of distinction, who were much awed by the appalling gentility of the three already assembled, and a little inclined to regret their own social importance.

Granfer and the widow, in the mean time, entered the great kitchen, a long, low, white-washed room, with heavy beams across

the ceiling, a stone floor, and a wide hearth with a wood fire burning between dogs upon it. The ceiling and walls wore their everyday decoration of hams, guns, a spit, various cooking utensils, a tiny bookshelf, and a large dresser, well garnished with crockery and pewters, together with their festal Christmas adorning of holly, fir, and mistletoe, and a round dozen of tin sconces bearing tallow candles. There was an oaken settle on one side the chimney corner, into the cosiest nook of which Granfer deposited his bent form with a sigh of content, and gazed round upon the assembled guests with benevolence.

On a long table on trestles at one end of the room was spread a solid meal, consisting of a huge ham, own brother to those depending in rich brown abundance from the ceiling; a south-country, skim-milk cheese, finely marbled with greenish blue veins, and resembling Stilton in reduced circumstances; a great yellow and brown mass of roast beef; a huge pie; several big brown blocks of plum-cake; and some vast loaves of white home-baked bread and pats of fresh butter. The forks were of steel, and black-handled like the knives; and the spoons, of which there was a dearth, were pewter. A deficiency of tea-cups suggested to Corporal Tom Hale the agreeable expedient of sharing one between a lady and a gentleman, which was hailed with applause by his naval brother, and immediately acted upon.

For those guests who looked upon tea as an enervating beverage, there was ample provision in the shape of various brown and yellow jugs filled with ale from the cask Tom and Jim had procured for the occasion; and it was generally understood that liquor of a still more comforting nature was held in reserve to stimulate conviviality at a later hour. The blacksmith, Straun, the clerk, Stevens, with their wives and families, were there; also Baines, the discontented tailor, and the husbands of the best-parlour ladies.

The wheelwright's wife, a comely woman of thirty, and his sister, a blooming damsel some ten years younger, ran to and fro with flushed faces among the guests, while the widow made herself ubiquitous.

The uniforms of Tom and Jim, with those of three or four artillerymen from the neighbouring forts, and the red coats of a couple of linesmen, together with the bright ribbons of the women, lent colour and variety to the monotony of black coats and smock-frocks, and upon the whole the wheelwright's kitchen presented as cheery and animated a sight as one would wish to see on a New Year's Eve. Nor was a town element wanting in the rustic gathering; for just as tea was in full swing, and little

Dickie Stevens—whose tea lay in the future, after the serving of his elders—was supplying the place of a band by playing hymn-tunes on his concertina, a taxed-cart drove up, and deposited two chilled mortals from Oldport, Mr. and Mrs. Wells, greengrocers, and related, by some inextricable family complications known only in that remote south-country district, more or less to nearly all the company.

Tea being finished, pipes were produced, also ale, and there was wild work in a dimly lighted quarter of the kitchen, where the Hale brothers had cunningly arranged unexpected mistletoe, and whence smothered shrieks of laughter and sounds as of ears being vigorously boxed issued every now and then.

The odd part about the mistletoe business was the extreme gullibility of the ladies, who were by far too guileless to profit by the experience of others in that dangerous region, and suffered themselves to be decoyed thither on the flimsiest pretexts, and betrayed the utmost surprise and indignation at the kissing which invariably ensued. As for Tom and Jim, they went to work with a business-like determination to kiss every girl in the room, and several respectable matrons into the bargain. It was about this time that the artillery sergeant and the wheelwright's pretty sister Patty vanished, and were subsequently discovered at the front door, enjoying the soft December breeze and studying astronomy, a study which produced the happiest subsequent results, and set the Malbourne bells chiming in the spring of the coming year.

So large and successful a party had not been held in Malbourne for many a year, the predominance of the military element greatly contributing to its success; for the sons of Mars excelled not only in the art of pleasing the fairer sex, which has in all ages been considered their special function, but possessed many other accomplishments of social value. A very pretty bit of fencing was exhibited between a red and a blue coat, and Corporal Tom snuffed candles with a pistol, amid shrieks of terrified delight from the women. One soldier sang a comic, another a sentimental, song; and when little Dick Stevens was perched on a table, and warbled out, "Rosalie, the Prairie Flower," and "Wait for the Waggon," to the accompaniment of Wax's clarionet and Baines's violin, the kitchen ceiling trembled and threatened to drop its quivering hams and hollies at the powerful chorus furnished by these stalwart warriors, and the gentility of the best parlour was finally melted by it to such a deliquescence as to mingle freely with the vulgar currents circulating in the kitchen.

Indeed, village talent was quite in the shade during the first part of the evening, and the discreet Corporal Tom observed such

depreciation on the faces of the village geniuses that he resolved to put off asking for the recitation with which he knew a certain warrior to be primed until a later hour, and created a diversion by proposing a game of Turn the Trencher, which absorbed the children and younger people at one end of the room, and left the circle of elders round the chimney free to converse or visit the best parlour, where fruit and sherry wine were laid out, as they pleased.

"I seen young Mr. Maitland in Oldport to-day," observed the town greengrocer's lady, one of the fireside circle, by way of furnishing the town news to her rustic friends.

"Now, did you, Mrs. Wells?" returned her host. "Ah! so you zeen he?"

"Yes, Mr. Hale; I seen him go into the bank opposite, and stay there — oh! I should think a good hour," continued Mrs. Wells, adjusting her cap-ribbons with a complacent sense of their splendour. "He's grown more personable than ever; but he do look ill, poor young gentleman, to be sure—that white and thin!"

"That's living in Lunnun," said Hale; "Lunnun takes it out of a man. I never held with going to Lunnun myself. Never knowed any good come of it."

"Ah, you don't know everythink, Jacob Hale!" said Granfer, benevolently. "Tain't, zo to zay, nateral to a man as gives hisself entirely to wheels. You doos your best, but more zense can't come out of ye than the Almighty have a put in. Na-a. You don't know everythink, Jacob Hale, I zays."

The profundity of this remark produced a deep impression, particularly upon the wheelwright, who appeared to think he had received a great compliment from Granfer, and rekindled his pipe at the burning gorse on the hearth with a beatified air.

"Zeems as though zummat had been a-taking of it out of Mr. Cyril," observed the blacksmith, thoughtfully.

"'Tain't, zo to zay, Lunnon, Jarge Straun," replied Granfer, solemnly. "No, Jarge Straun; 'tain't Lunnon, as you med zay. I zes to Bill Stevens 's marning, I zays, 'Bill,' I zays, zays I, 'brains is the matter wi' Mr. Cyril,' I zays, 'that's what's the matter wi' he;'" and Granfer's keen grey eyes took a survey of all the listening, stolid faces, and he experienced a keen sense of enjoyment, as he leant forwards, his hands crossed on his staff, and felt that he was getting into regular conversational swing. "Ay, that's what I zed, zure enough," he added.

"Brains!" repeated Straun, thoughtfully. "I never yeared of nobody dying of brains, as I knows on."

"You ain't a yeered everythink, Jarge Straun," returned

Granfer, severely. "Ay, you med mark my words, it all hruns to brains wi' Mr. Cyril; there ain't, as you med zay, nothing left to hrun to vlesh and vat, whatever he med put inzide of hisself. Mankind is like the vlower o' the vield: where it all hruns to vlower, there ain't, zo to zay, zo much leaf as you med swear by; then, agen, I tell 'ee, where it all runs to leaf, you can't expect no vlower to speak on. Look at broccoli!"

Here Granfer, being fairly launched, struck out from personal to general observations, and thence, at the prompting of his grandson, to the hoary regions of history.

"Ay, I minds Boney, to be zure—well I minds he;" and he related the oft-told tale of the frequent scares the inhabitants of those coasts received, sometimes by authentic rumours of Bonaparte's appearance at sea, sometimes by the accidental or mistaken kindling of the beacons on every prominent headland and on the downs, where a watch was kept day and night for the appearance of the dreaded foe.

He told how the wealthy farmers sent their silver and other valuables, sometimes including even their women and children under the latter head, inland for safety—most of them, apparently, having first consulted Granfer on the subject—in consequence of Bonaparte's rumoured descents on that fated coast; also of the rousing of the volunteers at the dead of night on one of these occasions—of their march to the seashore, and their all getting lost on the way, and arriving next morning on a scene of profound peace. Then came the great smuggler story, and the tragic history of the loss of the ship *Halifax*, the crew and passengers of which lay buried in the wind-swept churchyard near the fatal shore which wrecked them. Five young women were among those washed ashore and subsequently buried, and their appearance, as Granfer saw them, lying pale and beautiful side by side awaiting burial, was the climax of this story; after delivering it he usually paused and looked round for some moments with working lips to enjoy the silence of the interested listeners.

Having thus got his audience, which consisted mainly of village seniors, well in hand, Granfer began, to the accompaniment of the young people's continuous laughter, somewhat softened by distance, to play upon their love of the marvellous and the horrible, and produced some delightful creeps by his eerie tales; and finally landed himself in his renowned narrative of his midnight adventure upon Down End, a bleak, storm-stricken eminence, where the last man gibbeted in these parts, a truculent villain, with a most romantic history, then swung in chains.

Granfer had been belated on a moonless, cloudy night, had

wandered far in the cutting wind, and had begun to guess that he had at last done with the downs, and reached the well-known Down End—an unpleasant spot for a midnight stroll, since, besides the unwelcome presence of the murderer on his gibbet, an extensive chalk quarry there supplied an array of little precipices high enough to cost any one slipping over the edge his life.

Granfer had arrived at a vague mass looming through the darkness, a dim *something*, which he conjectured to be the sign-post, an erection which shared the same eminence with the gibbet at many yards' distance from it, and was about to strike a light with the flint and steel in his pocket to a weird accompaniment of shrieks and moans and unholy riot of clankings and hissings, which might be only the voices of the midnight storm, but, on the other hand, *might be* what Granfer wisely left to his hearers' imaginations, when "all on a zuddent there comes a girt bang on the shoulders of me, vlint and steel vlies out of my hands, and down I goos, vlat as a vlounder on my väace, wi' zummat atop o' me," the old man was saying, his wrinkled face and keen eyes lighted by the blazing gorse fire and his own imagination, while Straun and Hale, and the other worthies, with open mouths, staring eyes, and dropped pipes, and the women, with various contortions of visage and extensive clasping of shivering hands, gazed with tense, strained attention upon the withered, eager countenance, when the door burst open, and William Grove, supported by Corporal Tom, staggered into the kitchen, white-faced and trembling, and fell into a chair placed for him in the centre of the room, clapping his hands convulsively upon his knees, and exclaiming at intervals, "O Lard! O Lard 'a massey!" and the sudden apparition, coming thus upon strained nerves and excited imaginations, produced a most alarming effect.

The women screamed and clung to one another; the men uttered ejaculations; the game of Turn the Trencher broke up in dismay, and the players came clustering round the distracted Grove; while the services of the military were called into requisition to soothe the terrors and agitations of the prettiest girls, the gallant sergeant finding it necessary to place his arm round the blooming form of Miss Patty Hale for the distressed damsel's support.

"Lard 'a massey! Willum Grove," exclaimed Granfer at last, with impatience, "if you ain't got nothink better to zay than Lard 'a massey, you med zo well bide quiet, I tell 'ee. Lard love 'ee, Willum, you never had no zense to speak on, but you be clane *dunch* now. Ay, Willum be clane *dunch*," he added; while the astute Tom, who said that William had come flying in at the

porch door (where the gallant corporal had been helping pretty Miss Cave to admire the moon), and could be prevailed upon to make no other observation than that so scornfully censured by Granfer, assisted the waggoner's faculties by a timely draught of ale. After disposing of this, and drying his mouth with the back of his hand, William recovered slightly and found his tongue.

"Lard 'a massey on us all!" he cried; "they bin an' done for poor Ben Lee."

"Done for him!" cried a chorus of voices in various tones of horror and dismay.

"Done var en, zure enough!" repeated William, rocking himself backward and forward, in a strange contrast to his usual stolidity. "We bin an' vound the body!"

It was even so. Ben Lee left his home at dinner-time, and had not returned. At tea-time, Mrs. Lee was returning in the dusk from an errand to Malbourne, and met a hurrying figure clad in grey, as she came through the fields beneath the wood, which was on the crest of the hill above the Temple. She found only Alma in the house, and after waiting with more discontent than disquiet, she concluded that work had delayed her husband, and finally took her tea and seated herself at her needlework by the fire.

At half-past seven Sir Lionel and Lady Swaynestone, with their daughter, were dressed for a dinner-party and awaiting the arrival of the carriage, which had been ordered at that hour. But no carriage appeared, and a message to the stables elicited the news that the coachman had not been there since the afternoon, when Ingram Swaynestone chanced to have seen him near his home. A messenger to the Temple returned with the tidings that he had not been home; and then Judkins asked for an audience with Sir Lionel, which resulted in a search-party being sent forth to find the missing man, whose habits were regular and punctual.

William Grove, who chanced to be on some errand to Swaynestone for his master before going to the wheelwright's party, assisted in the search, and was with Judkins when Lee was discovered quite dead in the wood above his home. There were no signs of any struggle on the hard frozen path, from whence his body had evidently been dragged into the fern and brush, whither it was traced by the marks on the rime-covered moss and the disorder of the ferns and brambles. A slight wound on the face, which had bled, but could not have killed him, was the only sign of violence at first seen.

The lights were not extinguished at Swaynestone House till

nearly dawn. Sir Lionel, who was a magistrate, set to work at once to investigate the fatal affair, the police were immediately informed, and every member of the Swaynestone household was closely questioned, as well as Mrs. Lee. Poor Alma could not be subjected to much interrogation, and was not in a position to throw any light upon the tragedy. Death was not the only visitor at the Temple; a new life, scarcely less tragic than the death, began there on that fatal night, and the New Year rose upon sorrow and dismay in hall and cottage.

It took long to extract what he knew of the affair from William Grove, but this was at length accomplished, amid varied comment and ejaculation. Granfer said no further word until the whole truth had been elicited, and then upon the first favourable pause he looked round with an air of great solemnity, and took up his parable thus: "You med all mark my words. Zomebody'll hae to swing for this yere. Ay, I've said it, and I'll zay it agen: zomebody'll hae to swing."

CHAPTER XII.

NEXT to the divine sweetness of youthful love, nothing so completely charms and enthrals us as the rapid development of new ideas and the swift inrush of fresh knowledge in the spring-time of life. How the world widens to the eager student, what vast and endless horizons open out to his gaze, as he acquires fresh knowledge! What a sense of power his thoughts give him as they draw together from the vagueness of scattered speculations, and take definite shape before him! Love unlocks the gate of a yet undiscovered world of emotion, which has its higher and lower circles, its purgatory and paradise, and its endless possibilities beyond; knowledge and ripening thought rend the obscuring veils from the illimitable universe. The enthusiastic delight of fresh discovery is in both cases the very elixir of life; nay, it is life itself.

On the last day of the year, Everard discovered the new world of love; and on New Year's morning, under the stimulus of a fresh happiness, a theory, after which he had long been groping with many a vague surmise and hazardous hypothesis, interrupted by hopeless gaps in evidence, suddenly revealed itself complete and flawless before him. It came like an electric shock, with such a happy flash of inspiration that he was obliged to pause in his dressing to take in the results of the unconscious cerebration

which his studies and speculations had set up, while tears of joy rushed to his eyes. Clear and distinct as it was to his own mind, he knew that years of patient labour and minute scientific investigation must pass before he could present it to other minds, but he knew also that, once verified, it would make an epoch in the study of physiology.

Such a superabundance of happiness as Everard's might well excite the malignity of envious gods, and would have prompted an ancient Greek to throw away some precious thing in all haste. But being a Christian Englishman, Everard did not follow the example of Polycrates; nay, had he been a Greek of old days, he would never have imputed envy or malignity to the strong immortals. Strength was to him a guarantee of goodness, because his own strength made him noble and kind; it made him also pitiful to the malice and spite of weak things.

Full of this new rapture, his eyes hazy with abstraction, as the eyes of dreamers are hazy with dreams, Everard went forth to meet the New Year's new joy like one borne upon clouds, and reached the breakfast-room just at the end of prayers. Mr. Maitland, according to custom, was dismissing the maids with a kind good morning and New Year's wish, when Eliza, whose face was stained with tears, paused with a spasmodic, "Oh, please, sir!"

"You are discomposed, Eliza," said Mr. Maitland, gently, while he looked round and observed similar perturbation on the faces of the other maids. "Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Poor Ben Lee!" sobbed Eliza, resorting to her handkerchief.

"He was found dead, sir," added Martha, the housemaid, her grief, which was sincere, tempered by a certain delight in the tragically impressive.

"It was Stevens brought the news," added the cook, who was also not impervious to the pleasure of communicating disastrous intelligence.

"Found dead! My good girls! In Heaven's name, where? when? Oh, surely not! Where *is* Stevens?" cried Mr. Maitland, as much agitated as the heart of woman could desire. "Oh, those poor Lees! What trouble! what trouble!"

"It was last night, sir," continued Eliza, much refreshed by her master's perturbation, and by the copious tears with which she had accompanied the broken narrative. "Sir Lionel had lanterns sent out for him."

"He did not die in his bed, then?" the deep voice of Everard broke in.

"He was hid away in the wood," replied Martha; "and they do say——"

"I must go to the Temple at once," interrupted Mr. Maitland, starting off to get his hat, with an injunction to the women not to talk over the tragedy, which he might as well have addressed to the wind.

Lilian with great difficulty succeeded in keeping him back until she had made him drink some coffee and take a little food, when he started off at railroad speed, bidding her tell the clerk there would be no service that morning. Then Henry and Lilian and the two children sat down to a melancholy breakfast, and the discussion of the tragedy, of which they gathered from the servants as much as William Grove had communicated on the previous night, together with a fine growth of conjecture and exaggeration.

"Poor Alma!" sighed Lilian, when her father was gone. "Oh, Henry! what do you think of it?"

"I am afraid it looks rather dark," returned Henry, not observing the entrance of Eliza with a hot dish. "Lee's behaviour, when last I saw him, was most unaccountable. His trouble evidently preyed on his mind, poor fellow."

"Oh, Henry! what do you mean? Not——"

"An unhinged mind quickly turns to suicide," replied Henry, suddenly checking himself as he became aware of the wide gaze of Winnie's eyes immediately opposite him.

Five minutes after, the whole of Malbourne knew that Dr. Everard had received the intelligence with little surprise, and at once ascribed it to suicide.

Cyril had started for Woodlands before breakfast, leaving a charming note of New Year's wishes for everybody, and saying that it was incumbent on him to go to Woodlands at once, to apologize for his incivility in not meeting Marion on the previous day.

"What a devoted lover!" Mr. Maitland had observed, on hearing the note read. "Well, man has but one spring-time, though the birds renew their youth every year."

"I think, papa," said Winnie, in one of those sudden visitations of acuteness which befall little girls occasionally, "that Cyril is not so devoted to loving as to being loved."

And Lilian knew that the child had hit on her brother's weak point.

After breakfast, Everard accompanied Lilian and the children on a visit to the invalid donkey and other dumb dependents. It was pleasant to see Lilian in the poultry-yard. When she entered the yard she gave a little coo, and a flock of pigeons, preening themselves aloft on gable and roof in the sunshine, came fluttering down, a rustling cloud of white wings, and settled upon her till

she seemed a parody on Lot's wife, a pillar of birds instead of salt, while the more adventurous fowls sprang up and pecked the grain from her basket and her hands, till she scattered pigeons, fowls, and all, with a light "Hish!" and wave of her arms.

Everard, the children, and the two dogs stood apart to watch this little scene, Everard smoking tranquilly, and delighting in the picture of Lilian involved in her cloud of dove-like wings. During this progress he told her eagerly of the theory which had been born in his brain that morning, and they both discussed it, Lilian being sufficiently grounded in science to comprehend something of the importance of the subject, and having, moreover, the receptive intellect which readily admits half-grasped notions.

"We shall have to work hard for this," Everard said, knowing that Lilian would willingly take her share of the toil.

"It will be well worth hard work," she replied joyously; "but I have other work now, so I must go in. No; I have not told mother," she added, in reply to a whispered question from Henry; "I would rather it came from you."

"And I have had no opportunity as yet," he said. "So I have to skate with these scamps, have I? Very well; but join us as soon as you can, Lilian."

"And mind you bring some cake," added Lennie, who was nothing if not practical; and the children, hanging one on each of Everard's hands, danced joyously off into Northover Park, where they were to skate on a piece of water a quarter of a mile off.

Just as they entered the gate by the lodge, Lyster Garrett was leaving it. He looked at Henry with some surprise, and received his greeting very stiffly.

"Oh, do come and skate, Lyster!" cried Lennie; "then you can help me, and Winnie can have Henry to herself."

"I am going to Swaynestone," Garrett said. "This is a sad business of Lee's. Foul play, I fear;" and he looked searchingly at Everard.

"Foul play?" returned Everard. "Nonsense! Why, I suppose poor Lee never had an enemy in his life."

"He had one," said Garrett, with marked emphasis. "I should strongly recommend that person to make himself scarce."

"Lee was not a man to make enemies, poor fellow," replied Everard. "It will all come out at the inquest, no doubt. Mr. Maitland is gone to the Temple to comfort the poor widow."

And they passed on, Everard wondering what on earth was the matter with young Garrett, who was studying for the Bar, and was rather inclined to look upon human existence as raw material to be worked up in courts of justice.

"The world doesn't *look* much older than it did yesterday, Henry," observed Winnie, thoughtfully; "yet it's sixty-three, and yesterday it was only sixty-two."

Henry did not reply, but looked reflectively at the frozen landscape and clouded sky, whence the sun had been shining half an hour before. There was a vague misgiving within him; Garrett's hints flung a shroud of dark conjecture over the Lee tragedy, which he had forgotten for the moment. The world did look older to him, and it seemed a whole year since yesterday. But the pond was soon reached, and the children's skates and his own had to be fitted on at the expense of freezing fingers and stagnant blood, which a few turns in the biting air set right again. Then the Garrett ladies appeared, and there was quite a little party on the ice, and the children having by this time learnt to go alone, Henry indulged himself in some artistic skating, and the world grew young again, and he did not observe that Miss Garrett and her sister declined all his offers of assistance, and avoided him as much as the small extent of the little lake would permit.

"I am not sure that I shall marry Ingram Swaynestone, after all," Winnie observed to Lilian, when she arrived with the promised cake in an hour's time. "I think pw'aps I shall have Henwy when I gwow up."

"There was nobody in the world like Ingram yesterday," Lilian laughed; "so I suppose your skating instructions have been more successful than his, Henry."

"This is rather a dismal New Year's morning," Lilian said to Henry, who was busily engaged in fitting on her skates. "Those poor Lees haunt me, and the servants say there are such dreadful surmises about Ben's death. I wish Cyril were here. I wonder what he is doing?"

Cyril at that moment was in the library at Woodlands, comfortably seated in a deep arm-chair by a blazing fire. The laity of the male kind were shooting; Marion, and her sister, Mrs. Whiteford, were busily employed with the other ladies in decorations and arrangements for the impending ball. Cyril had taken refuge in the library with a book that he was utterly unable to read, and was sorry to find that George Everard had followed his example.

The Rev. George had assumed that attitude on the hearthrug which means conversation, and the disposition of his coat-tails was such as forebodes a long discourse, as Cyril observed with inward groans. Cyril's face was strained and haggard; his mind was in the tense, over-wrought condition which craves solitude and repose; and he racked his brains for some pretext to escape from his brother-clergyman, who had the advantage of being his

senior by many years, and whose theology was of a kind to fill Cyril with despair, since George belonged to the straitest sect of the Evangelicals.

Mr. Everard began by commenting upon his young brother's worn appearance, and accusing him of fasting.

"I fasted," replied Cyril, "because I was too unwell to eat. And if I received the New Year with watching and prayer, you will surely allow that I might have done worse."

"Truly. I could wish many to follow your example, Maitland; but not to the injury of this fleshly tabernacle, as I fear you have done. Such misdirected zeal amounts to excess, and that will-worship against which we are cautioned. You played a very poor part at breakfast, I observed."

Cyril smiled, for he had observed, on his part, George Everard's vigorous onslaught upon his father's well-spread breakfast-table, and he replied that his lack of appetite was due to his own folly in taking a long walk fasting after a day of headache. "Indeed, I am thoroughly knocked up," he added wearily.

"My dear young friend," continued George, solemnly, "I have become deeply interested in you. I perceive that you are a very precious vessel."

In spite of his weariness, and the strange hunted look that made him appear to start at every sound, as if expecting evil tidings, Cyril's face kindled and gained an added charm at these words. Appreciation was the very breath of life to him, and he felt that he had hitherto thought too slightingly of George, who perhaps, after all, could not help being evangelical, and consequently rather slangy in his religious conversation. He made a graceful allusion to their impending relationship, thanked George for his good opinion, and expressed a hope that they might know more of each other before long.

"I have wrestled in prayer for you," continued the elder priest. "I shall continue to wrestle, that you may come to know the truth, and that you may have strength to resist the seductions of the Scarlet Woman. I observe great powers in you—singular powers; powers that may effect much in the vineyard, if you only devote them to your Master's service; powers which, unsanctified, will lead you into great temptations."

"I am in for it," thought Cyril, who disliked listening to other people's sermons as much as doctors object to taking their own prescriptions; "he is wound up for at least six heads." But his face wore the most winning expression of interest and the deference due to one so much older in the ministry than himself, while he replied modestly that he was aware that some talents had been

vouchsafed him, and did not intend to hide them in a napkin, but that he thought perhaps his dear brother rated him too highly in the kindness of his heart.

At which Everard smiled paternally, and proceeded to speak of Cyril's gifts—his agreeable manner and power of winning hearts, his eloquence, his intellectual polish, and his musical and flexible voice, and pointed out to him the peculiar power these would give him in his ministerial capacity.

"Not that these mere carnal gifts are anything in themselves," he continued; "they are but nets to catch men. The nets are not necessary, but it pleases the Lord to work by means, and those to whom much is given will have much to answer for. In short, you have very singular opportunities of doing good work in the vineyard. I am thankful that you have been moved to enter the ministry. You might have had a more brilliant career in a worldly calling. But what you have undertaken is worth any sacrifice. And no man, having once put his hand to the plough, may dare to look back."

George Everard was not destitute of the human weakness that leads us to believe in the value of our own good advice, but he would have been rather startled if he could have known the powerful effect his words had upon his susceptible and impulsive listener's mind.

"I *have* put my hand to the plough," said Cyril, taking away the hands in which he had buried his haggard face during this exordium, and speaking in those deep, strong chest-notes which so stirred the fibre of his listeners' hearts; "I will never turn back. I call you to witness, George Everard, in the face of high Heaven, that I will never turn back, and that I will make any and every sacrifice for the sake of this my high calling and vocation."

Cyril rose from his seat as he spoke, and raised one hand with an impressive gesture. All the languor and dejection vanished from his face and form; a dazzle of pale blue fire came from his eyes; his every feature kindled; his whole being expressed an intensity of feeling that almost frightened Everard, who felt something like a child playing with matches and suddenly kindling a wood-pile. He could only ejaculate faintly, "My dear young friend!" while Cyril paced the room with firm strides and loftily erect head, a thing of grace and spirit-like beauty, and at last paused in front of George with such a glance of fire as seemed to pierce through and through the soul of the elder man, and offered him his hand, saying, "Do you bear me witness?"

"I do indeed," faltered the other, overcome by the sight of an emotion beyond his conception, accustomed though he was to a

purely sentimental form of religion; and he pressed Cyril's fevered hand in his own cool one, uttering some words of prayer and blessing, thinking that possibly one of the sudden conversions he so constantly preached about, and so rarely discovered any traces of in actual life, had taken place.

"Your words," said Cyril, quietly, after a time, "were like a spark to a train of gunpowder. They came at a moment of internal wrestling, and helped me to a decision."

George Everard replied that he was blest in being the unworthy instrument of speaking a word in season, and proceeded to admonish his convert at length; while Cyril, with all the fire quenched in his look and bearing, sat drooping and haggard beneath the cold, unimpassioned gaze of his counsellor, busied with his own thoughts, and occasionally smiling a little inward smile as the well-worn phrases and various allusions to the Scarlet Woman fell on his wearied ear.

"In conclusion, dear Cyril," George said at length, "I must bid you beware of women."

Cyril started and flushed, but Everard smiled and continued—

"Do not mistake me. You have hitherto had no temptation from that source; the monastic discipline of your life at St. Chad's, however mistaken, has at least that advantage. But, my dear brother, you will find the weaker vessels a stumbling-block and a constant thorn in the flesh of the Christian pastor. Our sisters have a fatal habit of mixing personal with religious feeling."

Here he sighed deeply, and Cyril suddenly remembered a legend to the effect that the Rev. George, in his curate days, possessed a large cupboard full of unworn slippers worked by the faithful sisters of his flock. "Thinking that they love the manna furnished them by the faithful shepherd, they too often, and perhaps unconsciously, cherish a tenderness for the shepherd himself, and this leads to much that does not conduce to edifying. Such feelings are indeed harmless; but, though all things are lawful unto me, all things are not expedient, especially," he added, with unguarded confidence, "when one's wife is inclined to be jeal—— Well, you know, a young pastor should be prepared. And let no man be too sure of himself. Our poor sisters constantly want spiritual advice; let them seek it of an aged pastor. I would counsel you, whose manners and appearance are so strikingly calculated to impress weaker vessels with admiration, to confine your personal ministrations to men and elder sisters. You will be run after as a popular preacher, and women will be a snare to you, as tending to bring discredit on your calling, and giving

occasion to the enemy to blaspheme. The Christian pastor must not only abstain from all evil, but from all appearance of evil—nay, the remotest suspicion of it. Our light has to shine strongly before men."

"I feel that most keenly," replied Cyril, roused to interest. "I feel that the lightest imputation upon us is absolutely fatal to our influence; that we are bound to a far stricter life than others. By the way, Everard, a very difficult case of conscience was submitted to our rector some years ago. There was a man doing good work in a parish consisting mainly of cultured and wealthy people, a man who had great personal influence. That man in early youth had done a wrong, which he bitterly repented, to atone for which he would have given years of his life—perhaps even life itself. A girl"—Cyril paused, and a thick, sobbing sigh caught his breath and impeded his utterance—"a girl had been, alas! led astray. She died by her own hand. Years after, when the penitent was in the height of his usefulness, a man who had loved this girl found him out, and attempted to avenge the unhappy girl's death by killing him. He attacked him in a lonely spot, on a ledge of narrow cliff." Cyril paused again, and moistened his parched lips, passing his handkerchief over his damp, chill forehead at the same time. "There was a struggle for life—no violence on the priest's part; only the instinctive struggle for self-preservation—and the would-be assassin was hurled over the cliff to his death." Cyril paused once more, and caught his breath chokingly. "No suspicion was aroused; the verdict was accidental death. The clergyman gave no evidence. He went on his usual way, and no one ever guessed that his hand—the hand which gave the sacred elements!—had sent a fellow-creature to his grave. The question which concerned our rector was, whether the unintentional homicide ought to have volunteered his evidence, and confessed his involuntary share in the poor creature's death. You see," continued Cyril, suddenly lifting his face to his listener, "he must have brought up the old scandal if he had done so, and that, coupled with the mystery about the death, would have utterly ruined his career as a Christian pastor."

"True," replied George, thoughtfully studying the intricacies of the Turkey carpet. "How did your rector obtain possession of these facts?"

"The poor fellow confided in him—came to him for advice in his trouble."

"And what was the advice?"

"It was never given. Agitation of mind brought on severe

illness, which proved fatal. The rector found it difficult to arrive at any decision. What do *you* think?"

"Truly, my dear young friend, the case is perplexing. Had the question been referred to me, I should certainly have made it a matter of earnest prayer. As a mere abstract question, I feel inclined to favour the erring pastor's course of action. A revelation of the truth would doubtless have given great occasion to the enemy to blaspheme."

Cyril heaved a sigh of relief. "Very true," he replied, sinking back into the depths of his easy-chair, whence he quickly started in nervous tremor as the door suddenly opened, and glanced apprehensively round, to see nothing more terrible than the bright face and light figure of Marion.

"Oh! here you are, you bad boys, looking as grave as two owls," she said, in her light, delicate treble. "George, your wife wants you in the drawing-room at once."

The obedient husband rose immediately, but paused lingeringly at the door. "We will discuss the matter further," he said. "Cyril and I have been having the most interesting conversation, Marion. I have passed a refreshing morning with him. We have more in common than I supposed."

And with an indulgent tap of his young sister's cheek, George vanished, and left the lovers alone, Marion charmed to find such harmony established between the two ecclesiastics, who bid fair at one time to differ as only those of the same creed under slightly varying aspects can differ.

"Isn't it provoking, Cyril?" she cried. "Here is a telegram from Leslie, to say he cannot spare time to come to-night, and his regiment does not embark till the third. If any one wants to wish him good-bye, they can run over to Portsmouth to-morrow. I dare say, indeed! The other officers are coming; but we shall be short of men, I fear."

"Is that all?" returned Cyril, with a sigh of relief; for he had turned pale and shuddered at the sight of the telegram. "Well, dearest, let us run over with your father and Keppel to-morrow, and wish them all good-bye at once. I rather envy the admiral going on the Mediterranean station at this murky season."

"You poor boy!" exclaimed Marion, placing her hand upon his burning brow; "you look as if you needed some kind of a change. I am afraid your head is still aching."

"It is maddening," returned Cyril, detaining the caressing hand. "To tell the truth, I am very unwell. I ought not to have walked this morning."

"Indeed you ought not. I saw that you were quite lame from fatigue."

"And who is to blame for my walk?" returned Cyril, with forced gaiety; "who but Miss Everard? I suppose I caught cold in Long's gig yesterday afternoon. I had no overcoat, meaning to walk. I feel as if I had been beaten all over."

"Poor dear!" said Marion, tenderly. "And you actually have a little bruise here over the temple," she added, touching the place, which was tender even to her velvet touch.

"Oh, that's nothing!" Cyril replied hastily; but he rose and approached a small mirror, into which he gazed apprehensively. "Ah yes, I dressed in a hurry, and hit myself with a hair-brush. And this," he added, pointing to a strip of plaster on his chin, "I did in shaving."

"What can we do for you?" asked Marion. "I was going to ask you to carry some plants from the conservatory, but you must not."

"Come and sit by me, dear," Cyril replied, in his gracefully autocratic manner; "there is no anodyne like your presence."

So the lovers remained hand-in-hand by the library fire a good hour, Marion's bright eyes and caressing tones worshipping Cyril, who appreciated nothing so much as incense.

George Everard, in the mean time, was telling his wife what unexpected graces he had discovered in his future brother-in-law. "A very precious soul," he said. "He only needs Christian influence."

Mrs. Everard knew well that, according to the usage of her husband's tribe, the word Christian was not applicable to either of the Maitlands.

CHAPTER XIII.

When the little skating-party reached the Rectory, Mr. Maitland had not returned from his errand of charity, nor did he appear when luncheon was served. The meal was delayed half an hour, and then took place without him. Mrs. Maitland was depressed at the melancholy opening of the New Year, and Henry had devoted himself to the task of cheering and amusing her.

He read to her for a good hour before luncheon, while Lilian wrote notes, and the children, tired with the morning's exercise, buried themselves in books of their own. "The Prisoner of Chillon," for which Mrs. Maitland had an amiable weakness,

formed part of the reading, and Henry was rewarded for his rendering of it by the following observation from Lennie, who had not appeared to be listening :—"You should hear Cywil read that, Henry! You can't hold a candle to him." Whereupon Everard, in revenge, took him up by the waistband with one hand, and carried him out into the hall, where he stuck him up in a niche intended for a lamp, and whence Lennie had an uninterrupted view through the hall window and down the village street.

"Oh, I say," he cried, "look at all those policemen!" and Henry, looking out, saw a couple of blue-coated constables standing chattering with the villagers, one group being just outside the Rectory gate.

"Don't say anything about it before your mother, Lennie," he said, lifting the boy down from his perch. "They are making inquiries about Ben Lee, that's all."

They were finishing their meal, when Mr. Maitland's step was heard in the hall, and Lilian went out to meet him. To all her inquiries, he said that he wished to be alone for a little, and desired that wine and food might be sent to the study for him.

"He is a good deal upset, no doubt," commented Mrs. Maitland. "I sometimes think, Lilian, that your father is too sensitive for a parish priest."

"What would he be as a doctor, Mrs. Maitland?" Everard asked, laughing.

"Oh, Henry, we all know that only exceptionally hard hearts can endure that profession," she replied, to the indignation of Winnie, who maintained that the medical profession induced a particular tenderness of heart, as was manifested by the specimen they had in Henry.

They were about to leave the dining-room, when Eliza, in a great state of flutter, appeared to say that Mr. Maitland wished to see Dr. Everard in his study, whither Everard repaired with a dim sense of impending disaster. It was not an auspicious moment for speaking of his engagement to Lilian, and yet he felt that the momentous question was about to be decided. Could it be that Mr. Maitland had gathered some hints of his relations with her, and wished to put an end to it at once? Or, was he merely giving him an opportunity of declaring his intentions?

As Everard crossed the hall, Snip and Snap ran growling before him, and barked at an unseen figure standing outside the door. Mark Antony also ran out with a suspicious look and angry eyes; but Everard was too full of his own reflections to observe the animals. He whistled slightly to put himself at ease, and was ashamed to feel his heart beating like a girl's as

he paused to open the study door. He entered, closing it behind him.

Mr. Maitland was standing on the hearthrug with his back to him. Above the mantelpiece was a fine engraving of De la Roche's picture of the Agony of Gethsemane—a picture for ever afterwards associated in Everard's mind with that solemn moment in his life. The kneeling figure, awful in suffering, trembling before an anguish beyond human strength to endure, touched him with a new significance; the cup which human nature dared not grasp, but which divine love resolved to drain to the lees, suddenly, he knew not how, symbolized his life; the terrible struggle between spirit and flesh became his. All in one flash these feelings passed through him, for, as soon as the door closed behind him, Mr. Maitland turned and looked at him.

"What is it?" cried Henry, in low, choked tones.

Ten years had apparently been added to the gentle priest's age, and his haggard and careworn air emphasized his likeness to Cyril. But it was the look in his eyes which sent all the blood rushing thickly to Everard's heart, such a look of fiery anger and indignation as seemed utterly inconsistent with his kindly affectionate nature, a hurt look, a look of unendurable anguish. Once before, and only once, Henry had seen that look, and now all the years rolled back, and he saw the painful scene it recalled with vivid intensity. It was the only time Mr. Maitland had ever thrashed Cyril, an epoch in the children's lives.

Some choice fruit had been set aside for a dying parishioner, who chanced to have been Ben Lee's first wife, and Cyril, not knowing it was intended for any special purpose, and being unluckily alone in the dining-room with it, had yielded to a temptation he never could resist, and had eaten first one cool juicy fruit, and then another, until the dish was empty. In a boy of ten it was not a grave fault, and, remorse having seized the child just as the last peach vanished, he made up his mind to go and confess and receive some light punishment or perhaps only a rebuke. But just then inquiry was made for the missing fruit, its intended destination was announced in his hearing, and both father and mother were much annoyed at its disappearance.

All the household was interrogated, and expressed ignorance of the matter; and a servant having called attention to Cyril's proximity to the temptation, he was specially questioned, but denied in the calmest way having even seen such a thing as a nectarine. Later, when the mysterious disappearance was being discussed, Cyril expressed virtuous indignation against the greedy thief, and at the same moment, taking out his handkerchief, he

let fall a peach-stone, and, on being searched, a whole handful of fruit-stones was discovered in his pocket.

It was then that Everard saw that fiery look in Mr. Maitland's kindly eyes. He well remembered listening with the sobbing Lilian in the hall, and hearing the rod in its unsparing descent on the culprit's back, and the pale anguish of Cyril's face when he left the study, shamed and tearless, to throw himself into Lilian's arms, and tell her that he wished he had never been born. Later in the evening, he found the children crouched together in each other's arms, crying; and then Cyril told them how he had lied from fear, not so much of punishment as of the public disgrace of having robbed the sick. He never could endure to be thought ill of. And now Henry saw the same look of agony and anger in Mr. Maitland's face, and could only ask, "What is it?"

"Henry," the old man replied, in those fuller tones which resembled Cyril's, and which nothing but intense feeling could produce in him, "I have loved you as a son."

"Sir," replied Henry, "you have always treated me as one. This house has been my home."

"I have been proud of you, Henry; I have valued your intellect and respected your moral worth."

A terrible foreboding of what was coming shot through Everard's brain. He sank into a chair, and turned white to the lips. Mr. Maitland remained standing, with the same dreadful gaze fixed upon Henry, and the sublime sorrow of Gethsemane pictured above his head.

"You must know what I have to say to you," he continued. "Do not, I beseech you, do not pain me by obliging me to tell you in so many words."

"I do not know what you have to say to me," replied Everard, in a faint voice.

"You lie!" cried Mr. Maitland.

"Sir!" exclaimed Everard, starting to his feet.

"That you should bring disgrace upon the roof which sheltered you!" continued Mr. Maitland, looking in his passion more and more like Cyril.

"Sir," said Henry, with cold, hurt pride, "you presume upon your privilege as an older man and a clergyman. You have no right to insult me in this unwarrantable manner. I will try not to forget that you have been a father to me, when my own father was unable to see much of me, and that Mrs. Maitland—— I had no mother——"

"Thank God for that!" remarked Mr. Maitland. "Oh, Henry, what awful hypocrisy is yours! When I think of all you

said about that unhappy girl! When I remember the wrong we all, even his own father, did to Ingram Swaynestone!"

"What can you mean?" ejaculated Henry, turning red, and then white.

"Your own conscience must supply the answer, Henry. You know how you passed yesterday afternoon; you know that you returned with red hands and a bruised face to my table, to my hearth. You may yet, if you care to escape by the kitchen door, elude the vigilance of the police. But I do not advise you to do so. I advise you to surrender as quietly as possible, and I ask you, for the sake of ancient kindness between us, to bring as little scandal on this roof as possible. I will go to your poor father myself, and break the matter to him as soon as you are gone. In the mean time, the police——"

Henry burst into a laugh—a loud, harsh, dreadful laugh, that penetrated into the drawing-room, and startled Lilian and her mother. "The police!" he cried; "what have they to do with me?"

"They bring a warrant to arrest you on the charge of wilful murder."

"This is nonsense!" cried Henry. "Mr. Maitland, you cannot take the matter seriously; you must know that there is some absurd mistake."

"God help us all!" he replied, bursting into tears, "I wish I did! But the evidence against you is too clear."

Henry sat down once more, and tried to collect his startled thoughts, and resist the strange certainty which possessed him that the knell of his life was already tolling. He lifted his eyes involuntarily, and once more they rested upon the agony which was beyond even sinless human strength. In his own frame he felt the strong shudder which convulses the kneeling figure before the terrible, inevitable cup; a deep and solemn calm came upon him, and he began to think more clearly, while the fierce resentment that Mr. Maitland's unjust suspicion kindled in him died away into pain.

"You will break it gently to my father?" he said quietly, after a pause. "Tell him it is a mistake, which a few words will probably set right."

"Your poor father! And Cyril, my poor Cyril; it will be a cruel blow to him!"

"I hope that—Lilian—and Mrs. Maitland—I trust they know nothing of this? If they could in any way be prevented from knowing the object of these men's presence," continued Henry, when he was interrupted by a knock at the door.

It was Eliza, with the inspector and two policemen behind her

"Come in," said Everard; and they entered and formally arrested him.

"And the quieter you go the better, sir," observed the inspector. "The fly is waiting just outside the gate in the road."

"Must I go through the hall?" asked Everard.

"I fear there is no other course," returned Mr. Maitland.

"I will just go and account for my sudden departure to the ladies," said Everard; but the inspector, who had taken certain steel implements from his pocket, while one of the men stood before the door, here informed him that he could not go without his escort and those same glittering ornaments, which he proceeded to adjust to Henry's wrists with the dexterity of long practice.

Like one in a dream, Henry submitted to this ignominy, and saw Mr. Maitland step across the hall and carefully close the drawing-room door, while Eliza fetched his hat and coat; and thus, without any farewell, he walked out of the familiar doors, observing as he went the three troubled pets, the dogs giving vent to occasional reproachful growls, and the cat stalking uneasily about, and uttering a plaintive mew as he passed him; and he felt the unaccustomed touch of steel on his wrists, and half wondered at the strange proximity of the policemen on either side of him. As he stepped out on the gravelled drive, he was startled to see a little figure with a white face spring forwards and leap to his arms. It was poor little Winnie. He bent down and kissed her.

"Don't be frightened, darling; I shall soon be back. It is only a mistake," he said, touched by this incident, and Mark Antony's sympathetic mew; "tell Lilian it is a mistake."

He could see Lilian through the side of the bay-window of the drawing-room. Her face was turned from him, and she was tranquilly reading the morning paper, which did not reach sequestered Malbourne till that late hour; nevertheless, he was glad when he was outside the gate, and safely hidden from her sight in the fly.

The village was full of life; the whole population had apparently turned out, open-mouthed and interjectional, to see and discuss the extraordinary proceeding. On a little patch of green Everard saw Lennie, with his jacket off, engaged in fighting with Dickie Stevens, who was apparently getting the worst of it, and was, indeed, finally vanquished after a severe battle. The unlucky Dickie had alluded in plain and unvarnished terms to the end which probably awaited Dr. Everard in consequence of his imputed crime; hence the battle.

The forge was blazing away, but the clink of the hammer was unheard. Straun had left his iron half shaped on the anvil, and stood outside, bare-armed and grimy, ready to pull off his brown-paper cap when the fly passed; and Granfer leant against the sill of the opened window, with a countenance expressive of the deepest wisdom, and shook his head ominously. It was not for a man of his knowledge and sagacity to betray surprise; he had evidently foreseen and predicted the event, and knew more about its probable termination than it was prudent to reveal. The usual village parliament was grouped around him, with its hands chiefly in its pockets, and its countenance distraught; but no cap was lifted when the fly passed save Straun's. That and a curtsey from a little girl, and a slow and solemn salute from Tom Hale, who was drawn up at the corner of the wheelwright's yard with a stiffness and precision which suggested the presence of the whole British army, alone greeted the fallen man.

The news of Lee's death did not reach Woodlands till the afternoon, when it was bruited about among the servants, one of whom had caught various strange rumours in Oldport. It floated up to the drawing-room, where it aroused but a tepid interest, save in Marion. Cyril agreed with her that it was very sad and shocking, but expressed little surprise, or, indeed, interest.

He was very restless, and, as the afternoon wore on, left Marion, and wandered aimlessly about, in spite of the fatigue and illness of which he complained. Every sound startled him, and he kept looking expectantly towards the gates, till about four o'clock, when the noise of wheels caught his tense hearing, and he saw his father drive up to the door in the little pony-chaise. He made one step forwards to meet him, and then he went back, and, passing behind some laurels, which effectually screened him, went towards the back of the house, and paced up and down on a terrace, which commanded a view of the grey sea, turning his head constantly towards the house, whence he expected a summons.

Some ten minutes passed, and no one sought him. To Cyril it was an eternity. His nervous agitation became unbearable; he was consumed with inward fever. Nothing was heard in the chill winter afternoon, save the heavy boom of the ground-swell, which filled all the air with a sullen, steady roar, a roar which confused Cyril's senses with its unceasing thunder, and seemed full of menace to him. The sea, which was about half a mile from the grounds, was coldly grey, and looked, with its calm breadth of unruffled surface, like a sheet of steel. The sky also was steely grey, save in the west, where the departed sun had left some pearl and opal gleams in the cloud-rifts; there was no wind, and the

frost still held. Cyril bared his hot forehead to the still winter air, and some broken words of prayer escaped him.

"I would have atoned," he murmured—"I would have atoned at any price, but it was not possible; the wrong is irreparable. Take Thou the will and the broken heart of contrition."

Then some sound smote upon his hearing above the august thunder of the unquiet sea, and he replaced his hat and turned towards the house. But no one came forth, and the sea went on booming heavily as before, only, to Cyril's vexed spirit, it seemed that its hoarse roar rose to a deafening intensity, like the trouble in his breast.

"If it were but over!" he murmured. "I cannot endure this suspense;" and he turned, half staggering, and entered the conservatory, where he was still alone. He felt very ill, and wondered if some deadly sickness were about to fall on him. Body and mind alike seemed failing under the heavy burden he bore. He leant his elbows on a bench and supported his head on his hands, gazing through some bright flowers out on the pitiless sea, and sighed out that he could not bear it, that he wished all were over, and himself at rest from the dreadful stress of life.

A sharp pruning-knife lay near him; his eye rested longingly upon it, and he thought how easily it would still the terrible tumult within. No pain; only a pin-prick, as it were—he knew exactly where to strike; Everard showed him one day when they were discussing the subject—then a bright, warm jet of blood; a growing languor, deepening into an eternal sleep. He put forth his hand and touched the knife, even felt its edge, and then dropped it with a shudder, and betook himself to prayer. And in his prayer he vowed a passionate vow, were he once delivered from this impending terror, to consecrate his life anew to his great and sacred calling, and to devote body, soul, and spirit with unsparing vigour to that one supreme cause. Calm fell upon him then, and he heard the footsteps of the approaching messenger with a serene face. It was only a servant, with a quiet, everyday countenance.

"The admiral wishes to see you in the library at once, sir," he said.

The admiral! Cyril turned sick. Why not his own father? Was it so bad as that? He walked, however, quietly through the darkening house, and entered the well-known door of the library with a calm face. A servant had just placed a lamp on a table before the fire, the ruddy blaze of which danced over the room with fantastic cheerfulness. George and Keppel were standing on the hearthrug, asking each other what had happened.

Their presence steadied Cyril, and conveyed a vague comfort to him.

"I say, Cyril," observed Keppel, in his strong, cheery voice, "there's a row of some kind; all hands piped. What the deuce is your governor up to?"

The door of an inner room, the admiral's special sanctuary, opened, and he came forth, accompanied by Mr. Maitland, who was too troubled to exchange any greeting with the young men.

"Well, my lads," said the admiral, standing with his back to the fireplace, and plunging at once into the subject, "here's the devil to pay. Maitland says that Swaynestone's coachman was murdered last night——"

"Murdered!" cried Cyril, springing from the chair into which he had dropped his weary, aching frame.

"Murdered!" echoed George and Keppel, in varying degrees of horror.

"My dear Everard," interposed Mr. Maitland, "you are so precipitate. Spare the young men; break it gently."

"Gently! By George, Maitland, murder is murder, and a damned ugly thing, however you break it!" retorted the honest admiral, who had by no means enjoyed Mr. Maitland's kind endeavours to break it gently. "The women will have to be told; somebody had better break it to them," he added, passing his hand thoughtfully over his fresh-coloured, weather-beaten face, while Cyril shuddered with a sick apprehension. "It's no use beating about the bush, lads," he continued, in his impetuous manner; "the long and the short of it is, Henry is arrested for murder."

"Henry!" cried the three. "By Jove!" said Keppel; "My dear father!" added George; while Cyril burst into a hysteric laugh. "Nonsense! the thing is impossible, absurd, ridiculous. What ass arrested him?" he burst out.

"Stand by, Cyril. You side with your friend, of course. Hear the rest. Tell them, Maitland," expostulated the admiral.

"Do you mean to say, sir, that you think him guilty?" asked Keppel, fiercely.

"My dear Keppel," returned Mr. Maitland, "I would give the remainder of my life not to believe it. I have passed the whole morning with Sir Lionel, and I have heard such evidence as places it beyond a doubt."

Keppel swore steadily and intensely for some seconds, while George quoted Scripture at the same rate. Mr. Maitland thought that of the two he preferred Keppel's observations. Cyril dropped into an arm-chair, and his head sunk upon his breast.

"Steady, lad, steady!" exclaimed the admiral, approaching him. "We must stand to our guns."

"Brandy," murmured Cyril, faintly.

"He has been ill," said Mr. Maitland, apologizing for his son's weakness; while the admiral plunged into his sanctuary, and issued thence bearing some excellent rum in a little glass, and poured it into Cyril's white lips.

"What the deuce did you mean by swearing before the clergy, Keppel?" he asked, while doing this kind office.

"I am unwell; I have a heavy cold," gasped Cyril, reviving. "It is nonsense about Henry. Where is he?"

"We must bail him at once," said Keppel, when he heard that his brother was actually in custody at that moment; but Mr. Maitland reminded him that this course was impossible, while George groaned and observed parenthetically that Henry needed a fall to bring him to a serious state of mind.

"Serious!" echoed the admiral. "You may depend upon it, the poor beggar feels serious enough. Well, he was the only boy I never flogged of you all. He was such a little chap when his poor mother—— Damnation, George! if you spare the rod you spoil the child!" cried the poor man, turning aside to dash a couple of tears from his eyes, "The Bible tells you that."

"True, most true," returned George, conscious of having received a Benjamin's portion of the paternal rod.

"The question is, what is to be done?" said the practical Keppel, who was pacing the library with a wide balance of limb, as if the carpet were liable to rise in waves and upset him.

"Exactly," returned the admiral, with an air of relief. "How can we get him out of this hole, Maitland? We must spend all we've got to get him off and save the family honour. What's the first step? To London for a lawyer? And I sail on the third, and so does Keppel; and then Leslie is off to India. By Jove! it's the devil's own luck; nobody but a parson left to look after the family, and I put George into the Church—meaning no disrespect, gentlemen—because he was the fool of the family."

"It is too ridiculous to take this seriously," said Cyril. "The inquest will, of course, set Henry free. He will prove an *alibi*, or these thick-headed rustics will have sufficient sense to bring in a verdict of accidental death. What more probable than that Lee—in trouble, and probably a little tipsy—should slip in a wood on a dark night and fall heavily?"

"But," replied Mr. Maitland, who did not remember that Cyril could have heard nothing about a wood, "a man cannot

drag himself for yards into the underwood after receiving a mortal blow on the head."

"Who says he was dragged?" asked Cyril, quickly.

"There are the marks on the frosted moss and grass. I saw them myself," said his father; and he went on to place further evidence before them, while Cyril listened with a beating heart and gathering dread.

"Good heavens!" he cried at last, "don't you all see that it is morally impossible for a man of Henry's character to commit such a crime? Even if Lee were killed, Henry had no hand in it."

"Henry is as honest a fellow as ever stepped, Cyril," said Keppel; "but, you see, women are the very deuce. The best of men may be led on to anything, once he gets hung up in an affair of that kind."

"An excuse as old as Adam's iniquity," sighed Mr. Maitland.

"Henry had nothing to do with *that* miserable business," cried Cyril; "I would stake my life on it."

"Stand up for your friend, my lad," said the admiral. "He would be a doctor; and I won't deny that a surgeon is useful after a general engagement; but then, he would not even enter the service. Doctoring is bad for the morals; all this poking and prying into dead bodies is an infernal business not fit for a gentleman. Those very clever doctors are a bad lot, most of them in league with the devil. George said in his last sermon that the Almighty sends sickness as a punishment for sin, and it is a clear flying in the face of Providence to make people healthy."

"My dear father!" remonstrated George, who was not prepared for such an application of his sermon, flattering though it were.

"Yes, yes, you said so in the pulpit, and you are not in the pulpit now," proceeded the admiral, with a fine distinction between the preacher and the man. "Now for action, lads. When does this damned thing take place, Maitland?"

"The inquest will be held to-morrow, admiral; but the verdict may not be given for some days. In the mean time, we must try to get all the evidence in Henry's favour that we can. Lilian saw him return, but refuses to swear to it. She actually disbelieves the evidence of her senses."

"Poor Lilian," murmured Cyril, with a kind of sob.

"Oh, the women!" groaned the admiral. "George, go and break it; it is parson's work. Poor little Marion! you had better tackle her, Cyril."

"A solicitor must be procured to watch the case on Henry's

behalf at the inquest," said Mr. Maitland. "I suppose Weston would be the man; he is your man of business, I think."

"Just so," replied the admiral, instantly ringing the bell to order a carriage. "I'll go at once. By George! I had forgotten the dance. Half the county will be here in a couple of hours."

The consultation was at an end, and the meeting broke up, and Cyril, with a strange feeling of relief, went to Marion and told her what had occurred, while George did the same with the other ladies, who somehow had the tidings conveyed to the people staying in the house.

Breaking the news to Marion was not all pain; in fact, it brought a wonderful solace to Cyril's troubled soul. He spent the evening alone with her, and so exerted himself to convince her of her brother's perfect innocence and probable speedy release, that he went to bed with a lightened heart, and slept as no one else slept that night beneath the admiral's roof, the sleep of exhaustion, dreamless and perfect as that of an infant.

CHAPTER XIV.

In those days of unutterable amazement, Everard began to doubt his own identity. On the first day of the inquest he received an affectionate letter from Cyril, treating the affair of his imprisonment as a mistake, which a brief investigation would speedily clear up.

Then came the succession of surprises which the inquest brought, as witness after witness came forward and swore to actions of his which he had never so much as contemplated in imagination.

After the evidence of those who discovered poor Lee, and that of the surgeon, Mrs. Lee was the first witness. She last saw her husband alive at dinner-time, after which he left her to return to the stables, she said. She left the Temple for Malbourne soon after three, and on returning through the fields at about a quarter to five, she saw Dr. Everard spring over a hurdle leading into the fatal copse, and walk hurriedly along towards Malbourne. Although the moon was but just risen, she made him out distinctly by his grey suit. He had no stick in his hand, and, though he passed within half a dozen yards, did not appear to see her, and took no notice of her salutation. Her husband was a steady and sober man, but had of late been much depressed on account of

family troubles; had been especially vexed at dinner-time, and had eaten little. When asked what had distressed Lee, she replied that he had some difference with his daughter, whom he had discovered with Dr. Everard at midday.

Sir Lionel Swaynestone stated that he had last seen Lee at eleven in the forenoon; had known him all his life as a sober and industrious man and good servant.

Judkins described the hour and manner of his finding Lee's body. He had last seen him alive at three o'clock, when Lee told him that Dr. Everard would be somewhere near the Temple that afternoon, and that he intended, if possible, to meet him, and threaten him with exposure unless he consented to repair the wrong he had done his child.

Everard's solicitor here interposed to ask the nature of that wrong, and Lee's grounds for suspecting Everard of it, when, to his own deep amazement, as well as Everard's, he was told that Everard and Alma had been seen together in the copse by both Lee and Judkins on the very morning of Lee's death; and, further, that he, Judkins, had witnessed several clandestine meetings between them during Mrs. Lee's illness in the spring. In the subsequent examination before the magistrates, Judkins further witnessed to meetings at specified times, and to gifts of flowers exchanged between Everard and Alma. A book of poems, found in Everard's room at the Rectory, was produced, inscribed, "For Alma Lee, with best New Year's wishes, from H. E." Judkins also swore that letters had passed between them.

The solicitor having asked Judkins if Lee had not threatened violence towards Everard, he replied that he only threatened to assault the prisoner in case he refused to do justice to his daughter.

Judkins further deposed that, on returning from the downs with some horses he had been exercising at a little after four on the fatal afternoon, he had seen the prisoner enter the copse. On being subsequently asked by Everard how he had missed Mr. Swaynestone, who was riding towards the downs at the same time, he replied that he had drawn up for some minutes behind a screen of hazels, while Mr. Swaynestone was passing in the open. He did not until the trial add that he did this to watch the meeting of the grey figure with Alma.

John Nobbs, a stable-help, deposed to parting with Lee on the high-road outside the gate at three o'clock; the witness was starting for Oldport on foot, Lee walked up the meadow towards his home. Lee carried no stick, and was quite sober.

Several Swaynestone servants witnessed having seen Lee about

the place before three o'clock; after which hour no one appeared to have seen him alive.

Ingram Swaynestone bore witness to Lee's character; he last saw him alive at the stables at two o'clock. At twenty minutes past four, or thereabouts, Ingram rode across the meadow in which the Temple stood, at a canter, on his way across the downs to Shotover, when he saw Everard walking quickly along a hedgerow in the direction of Temple Copse. He was dressed in grey, carried a stick, and made no reply to Swaynestone's shouted greeting, beyond a wave of his hand. On returning through Malbourne, at ten minutes to five, Swaynestone again saw Everard walking in the moonlight across a field, at the corner of which the Malbourne sign-post stood. He reined in his horse, and called out to him; but Everard went hurriedly on, not appearing to see or hear him. The road was some fifty yards from the path Everard was pursuing, and the field was higher than the road.

William Grove had seen Everard at the same place and time. He expressed wonder to Jim, his mate, that Dr. Everard, at the sound of the waggon-bells—since he was then returning from Oldport with his team—and his own "Good night, doctor," did not come to receive a parcel the waggoner was bringing him from Oldport, and respecting the instant delivery of which he had been most solicitous. All this Jim Downer corroborated.

Stevens, the sexton, said that about sunset, or later, he was in the churchyard, and saw a figure in a grey suit, which he recognized as Dr. Everard's, leave the back premises of the Rectory, and ascend the hill in the direction of Swaynestone. He carried a stick.

Straun, the blacksmith, on the other hand, swore that he saw Everard pass through the village street by the forge at that hour, or a little before. He was uncertain about his clothes, but swore to the stick.

A Swaynestone keeper saw Everard a little later in a plantation on the upland. He described his grey suit and stick; he was not near enough to speak to him. A shepherd, cutting turnips in a field near, swore that Everard passed him at four o'clock, and stopped a moment to chat with him. He was not sure about his clothes; thought they were grey. Everard had a stick, also some very good tobacco, of which he gave him some. He told the shepherd that he was going across the downs to Widow Dove's. Dr. Everard wondered that two lone women should live up there in the solitary cottage, he said.

Eliza, the parlour-maid, bore witness that Everard was at the

Rectory between three and four; he was in the drawing-room with her mistress when she showed some visitors in. She saw him no more till about five, when he entered softly and hurriedly by the back door, and ran across the back hall in the dusk. Miss Maitland was leaving the kitchen at that time, and also saw Dr. Everard, whose figure was clearly shown by the light issuing from the kitchen. Miss Maitland called to him, "Henry, was Mrs. Dove at home?" but he made no answer, ran upstairs, and locked himself in. The cook also saw Dr. Everard at that hour, and heard Miss Maitland speak to him. Miss Maitland was rebuking the witness for not having lighted the hall lamp. Eliza next saw Everard an hour later. He came into the kitchen with his hand to his face, and asked the cook for some raw meat to save him from a black eye. Martha, the housemaid, said, "Oh, sir, what an eye you will have!" He replied, "I hope not; there is nothing like raw meat." Cook laughed, and said, "One would think you had been in the wars, sir. Have you had a fall?" He seemed confused, and said, "I don't know. At least, I ran up against a tree in the dark." At dinner, he told Mr. Maitland that he knocked his face against a door, and made signs to Miss Winnie not to tell. When he came into the kitchen, Eliza heard him say something to Miss Winnie about not telling. He seemed excited and confused at dinner. This evidence of Eliza's, given briefly at the inquest, only came out in full at the trial in Oldport Town Hall, when it was corroborated by the other maids.

Granfer was produced on the second day of the inquiry, and, with an irrepressible circumlocution which nearly drove the jury beside themselves, witnessed meeting Henry at the wheelwright's corner at five o'clock; he was inclined to believe that he wore the fatal grey suit, since he and Straun and several others had seen and commented on it in the forenoon.

What bewildered Everard most was the evidence of *things* against him. The housemaid witnessed, with tears, to finding bloody water in his hand-basin, and seeing the garments hanging to dry. The suit was produced, and bore other stains, which Henry had not observed by candle-light. He saw stains of earth, as well as those darker marks; bits of moss and dead leaves caught in the rough woollen material; the badly sponged spot he had seen at midday; and, more surprising still, a slight rent at the armhole, as if the sleeve had been torn in a struggle.

Buried among dead leaves and moss, the police found a handkerchief of Everard's, bearing the ominous crimson stains. Farther off, among thick holly-bushes, they found a stick, which

the doctor said might have dealt the fatal blow. Mr. Maitland identified the stick—a thick bamboo, with a loaded top—as his property. It remained usually in the hall, and was used by the family generally. Everard had taken it in the forenoon on his walk with the twins, as many people could witness. In Lee's pocket they found the two halves of the letter Alma had dropped in the forenoon. It was written on good notepaper, from the top of which an embossed heading had been hastily torn, so hastily that some of the end letters remained thus: $^{ORY}_{RNE}$. Similar paper was taken from a blotting-case used chiefly by visitors with the full address, "The Rectory, Malbourne." The handwriting, evidently feigned, was afterwards submitted to an expert, and compared with various specimens of Everard's writing.

Lee's watch, purse, etc., were found upon him; and, what puzzled Everard strangely, a leather bag, containing fifty pounds in gold, which had been stamped upon by a heavy foot, was found on the hard path some yards from the body. It was impossible to identify this, as it had no marks, and was one of those commonly used by bankers to serve their customers with gold; it was evidently, from its dull grey colour, an old one, which had passed through many hands. At the subsequent trial it was suggested that this money, so carefully arranged to defy identification, had been offered to Lee as the price of his silence, and by him indignantly rejected, and had been forgotten by the criminal in his agitation after the deed.

Everard's own statement was simple enough. He could merely say that, wearing the clothes in which he then stood, a prisoner, he had left the Rectory at about sundown—the exact hour he had not observed—and, passing through the village, where he exchanged a brief salutation with Straun, who was standing alone outside the forge, which was closed for the night, had walked through the fields as far as the fatal copse. There he had turned off and struck across the down to the solitary cottage known far and near as Widow Dove's. He remembered meeting no one save the shepherd, but had seen a man exercising two horses in the distance when on the open down. He was not near enough to recognize the rider, but concluded that he was a groom from Swaynestone or Northover.

He found the widow's hut empty, with no smoke issuing from the chimney, and no light in either window, and returned by a different path, which he described, meeting no human being till he descended into the high-road at Malbourne Cross, and spoke to Granfer (whose legal designation was Isaac Hale, by the way); he did not remember what he said at this interview, save that he

asked if Long's bell-team had passed. Going on in the dark to Long's farm, which was approached by a byroad at right angles to the highway, he found a little girl sitting on the doorstep of Grove's cottage, which was just outside the farm gate, and learnt from her that Grove was gone to the Rectory with a parcel.

His return at six, his romp with Winnie, and its consequences, he described; and, although cautioned that what he said would be put in evidence against him, deposed to finding blood on his clothes, and sponging it away, but expressed himself unable to account for its presence. He had never quarrelled with Lee, whom he had known and respected all his life. He had last seen him alive on Sunday in church, and had last spoken to him on the previous Saturday. He was too indignant at the imputation respecting Alma to deny it, but he denied having met her on the 31st, admitting that he was in the copse at the alleged hour, but saying nothing about Lilian being with him, since he could not endure the idea of dragging her name into such associations. He heard of Lee's death first on the morning of New Year's Day.

He almost smiled when, at the close of the wearisome inquiry, the jury returned a verdict of Wilful Murder against him.

Admiral Everard and Keppel received the intelligence by telegram just as the squadron was leaving Spithead. Leslie was already on his way to India, and so heard nothing.

The examination before the magistrates seemed to Everard but a weary repetition of the inquest nightmare.

The same witnesses appeared with the same evidence in fuller detail. The surgeon, a Dr. Eastbrook, who had attended the Swaynestone people ever since he began to practise, confirmed the evidence touching Lee's good health and regular and abstemious habits, and was borne out by a second surgeon, who had assisted him in a *post-mortem* examination. Both surgeons witnessed to contusions and other signs of struggle; they were unanimous in ascribing the death to a blow not self-inflicted, and both were of opinion that Lee's assailant must have been a man of considerable muscular power, Lee himself being a powerful man scarcely past the prime of life. In cross-examination, they admitted that a knowledge of anatomy would indicate the part behind the ear as one for a fatal blow. Poor Mr. Maitland gave evidence to Henry's spotless character, and was much dismayed at finding himself led into giving damaging statements of Everard's extreme eagerness to attend Mrs. Lee in the previous spring, and his frequent visits to the Temple. He was equally dismayed at the damaging effect of his evidence touching Everard's de-

meanour at dinner with regard to the black eye. Granfer also contrived to effect a little more mischief in the town hall.

Granfer was disgusted to observe that Sir Lionel, who was a witness, was not on the bench, and that a mere lad of some forty summers, a pompous man of commercial extraction, for whom the old aristocrat had the heartiest contempt, played the leading part on that august eminence. He therefore put on his most stolid look, and acted as if extremely hard of hearing as well as comprehension, and contrived to impress Mr. Browne-Stockham with the idea that he was past giving evidence. The magistrate, moreover, was fully impressed with a conviction of Everard's guilt, which impression he had derived from Sir Lionel, who was furious with indignation at the guilt and hypocrisy which had brought about the tragedy, and had made him accuse and suspect his own son amid all kinds of domestic discord, and was disposed to believe anything of the man who sat at his board one day and killed his beloved and trusted servant the next. Mr. Browne-Stockham, therefore, after many vain attempts, succeeded in getting Granfer, whose mental impenetrability caused innumerable titters in the court, to reply to his question if he understood the nature of an oath.

"A oath," returned Granfer at last, with an air of matchless vacuity, "a oath," he repeated in his slow way, as he scratched his head and slowly looked round the court—"ay, I hreckon I understand the nature of they. I've a yeerd more oaths in a hour than you could swear in a day. Ay," he continued after a pause, during which an explosion of laughter from the court was angrily subdued, and looking more helplessly vacant than ever, "my master was the sweariest man you ever see. I've a yeerd more oaths than you've got zuvverins avore you was barned—or thought on, for that matter," he added, with a sudden gleam of inane self-complacency in the eyes he directed upon the indignant magistrate, who muttered that the old fool was in his dotage, while the court again exploded with laughter, as courts so easily do.

"Do you know," Mr. Browne-Stockham asked, in his most pompous manner, when order was once more restored, "in whose presence you stand?"

Granfer once more looked round in his slow way, with an expression half-way between an owl and an idiot, and replied, without the faintest quiver of a muscle, "I ain't a zeen none of 'em avore, as I knows on; athout," he added, brightening up suddenly, "athout it's Sir Lionel. I knows he well enough. Knowed his vather avore 'un. Vine vigure of a man he was."

Here Granfer's evidence was lost in such a roar that the

magistrate was driven to the verge of frenzy, and threatened to clear the court. Finally, Isaac Hale, aged ninety-six, was duly sworn, and rather severely handled while giving his evidence as to his meeting Everard at five o'clock, the very hour at which the maids swore to his return by the back way to the Rectory.

Everard had given him a shilling to drink his health with, he said, and had further bestowed some tobacco upon him. For the consideration of a shilling, it was suggested, an aged rustic might well make a mistake as to the exact hour of meeting a friend on the highway. Mr. Browne-Stockham, moreover, was convinced, from Granfer's Brutus-like affectation of imbecility later on, that the old man was in collusion with the accused.

Mrs. Lee and Judkins both bore witness to the exchange of high words between Everard and Lee at their chance meeting on the Saturday, Lee having gone home in great excitement, and told them that he had forbidden Everard his house. Cyril was summoned to confirm these statements. There was no quarrel, Cyril said on his oath, but Lee seemed annoyed, neither of them knew why, and forbade Everard his house; they supposed him to be under the influence of drink.

Here the counsel for the prosecution took Cyril up sharply, and asked what grounds he had for such a supposition with regard to a man whose sobriety was well known; and, altogether, Cyril's evidence was severely tested and reduced to powder. He sat down with the despairing conviction that he had done Everard as much damage as possible.

Lilian's evidence, however, had a worse effect even than his. She had tried to avoid admitting her glimpse of the grey figure at dusk, but in vain. The maids swore that she had both seen and spoken to the supposed Everard, and she was placed in the cruel position of having to swear for or against an apparition, which she believed to be some trick of the senses and imagination, and which she could in honest truth neither affirm nor deny. Placed in the witness-box, she could only say that she thought she saw a grey figure flit by in the dusk, and that she spoke under the impression that it was Dr. Everard, but believed herself to have been mistaken. Pressed for a reason for doubting his identity, she could only give his silence when spoken to, and his subsequent denial at dinner of having come in at that hour, and it required no very keen intelligence to discover that Lilian wished to disbelieve in the apparition. She volunteered evidence as to the alleged meeting with Alma at midday, stating that she was with Everard the whole time, and that they had seen no human being besides themselves.

It did not follow from this, as was observed, that Alma was

not there, as Mrs. Lee and Judkins had sworn, or that Everard had not intended to meet her at that hour, had he been able to be alone. Alma was not in a condition even to make a deposition on her bed of sickness, since she continued more or less delirious for some weeks after her father's death; but her evidence was not deemed of sufficient consequence to justify a postponement of the trial, which, after a quantity of evidence which it would be tedious to detail, ended in a repetition of the coroner's verdict; and Henry, doubting whether there were any longer a solid earth to stand on or a just Heaven to appeal to, found himself committed for trial at the next assizes on the capital charge.

CHAPTER XV.

CYRIL'S direst anticipations had not reached a capital conviction, though he had feared manslaughter, and even Sir Lionel Swaynestone had his doubts as to the justice of the graver charge. Oldport public opinion, which was naturally stirred to its depths, was divided between the two; of the accused's innocence it had not the slightest suspicion. The little town was Liberal, not to say Radical, in its politics, and disposed to think the worst of a gentleman in his dealings with those beneath him.

Few people had a good word for a medical man of good birth, who was said to have taken advantage of both rank and profession to work such cruel harm as that imputed to Everard. The medical profession, strangely enough, has never been popular, skill in the healing art being usually attributed by the unlearned to the favour of the Evil One: a clever physician is prized and feared, but rarely loved. Even among the cultured there still lingers a faint repulsion for the man who is the only welcome guest in the day of sickness and peril, and society is only just beginning to honour the cultivated intellect and recognize the social value of the doctor.

The case of William Palmer, the notorious poisoner, was then fresh in people's minds, and the ease and impunity with which a skilful physician can become a murderer had awakened something of the old superstitious horror of the doctor's occult knowledge in the public imagination. Browne-Stockham and his colleague, a retired merchant of limited intellect and still more limited knowledge, and whose birth and liberal politics prejudiced him against Everard as a scion of a good old Tory family, were both strongly

prepossessed against the innocence of a doctor who had manifested such unaccountable eagerness to get a footing in a humble family under pretence of exercising his skill. Dr. Eastbrook had been ready and willing to attend Mrs. Lee as usual in the preceding spring, as his evidence stated; Dr. Everard had asked leave to attend with him, because it was an unusual and very interesting case, a thing neither magistrates nor coroner's jury could understand.

Dr. Eastbrook, an older man, and too busy to be very eager about unusual cases, was not sorry to have Everard's help, since the case required more frequent visits than he could conveniently give, and finally he gave up the case to him altogether. This the public mind could conceive; but Everard's great eagerness and assiduous watching of the sick woman, needed some motive to account for it. What motive could there be save that sinister one of seeing Alma constantly and alone? Thus many prejudices gathered together to precipitate Everard's doom, and although the prejudice of class was not so strong against him before the judge and jury at the assizes, yet there his profession exposed him to as great disfavour.

Everard once discussed with Cyril the subject of the doctor's small popularity as compared with the clergyman's, and Cyril accounted for it partly by the usefulness of the surgeon. "Clergymen," he observed, in one of those bursts of ingenuous satire that delighted Everard, "are of no use save at two or three august moments of life—when a man dies, gets married, or is born—therefore they inspire popular reverence as belonging to the ornamental and superfluous portion of existence—its fringes, so to speak. Doctors, on the contrary, cannot be dispensed with; their services are needed and obtained on the most homely occasions, and men never reverence the indispensable. Bread and cheese is taken as a matter of course, but the champagne of festivals is thought much of."

Cyril often affected a cynicism which amused Everard the more from its contrast with his supposed character.

It was difficult to move through the dense crowd which gathered round the Oldport Town Hall when Everard issued from it at the conclusion of the magistrates' inquiry, and public opinion expressed itself in hisses and groans as the vehicle in which he was being conveyed moved slowly, and not without some effort on the part of the guard of police, through the square.

Not every day was there such an exciting event as an examination for murder in the town hall, nor was it often that a culprit of such high social standing appeared in the well-known dock. The

little town wore quite a festal air. Street-musicians and barrows laden with nuts, oranges, and ginger-beer drove a thriving trade; and there was not a bar at public-house or hotel in the place which did not receive an access of custom during the inquiry. Nothing else was talked of, and the experiences of ages has shown that when mankind talk they must drink something more inspiriting than water; also that when they drink that something they invariably talk in proportion to its inspiriting qualities. Tea-tables are supposed to be the great centres of gossip, and their female devotees its high priestesses. This is a popular fallacy. The ladies bear their part valiantly, but they cannot match the men. From the West End club down to the humblest public-house, male coteries are the great sources of social information, which arrives in a weakened second-hand form at the female tea-board, where, indeed, it is frequently robbed for obvious reasons of its most racy characteristics.

On the evening after the termination of the great murder case, the pleasant bow-windowed room behind the bar at Burton's Hotel, which, as everybody knows, is opposite the town hall, was occupied not only by its nightly frequenters, but also by many less familiar guests, who dropped in ostensibly for a cigar and brandy or pale ale for the good of the house, but really to hear the news, or rather to enjoy the curious pleasure experienced by human bipeds in retelling and rehearing from many different lips what they know perfectly already—like the readers who enjoy the whole of "The Ring and the Book." Amongst these grave citizens was Mr. Warner, the owner of the large linen-draper's shop, which makes the High Street so resplendent with plate-glass and fashionable fabrics.

"If ever I saw guilty written on a man's face," he observed thoughtfully, "it was stamped upon Everard's."

"I never saw a fellow with such a brazen look," returned young Cooper, of the great auctioneering firm. "Eastbrook says he is awfully clever."

"Those fellows generally are," added Strutt, the principal tailor, removing his cigar from his lips and looking lovingly at it. "How I pity those poor Maitlands!"

"Nice fellow, young Maitland! I've known him from a boy," said Warner. "They always deal with us. He was in my shop on the very day of the murder."

"Ah! and he was in mine on that same day," added Strutt. "Taking manners he has. Till he went to Cambridge, every thread he wore came from us. I know him well."

"Looks ill; trouble, perhaps," chimed in young Mr. West,

cashier at the county bank. "I hear that this Everard was bred up with him."

"He was," returned Warner; "but this young Maitland's manner is up to everything. The young scamp! he came into our establishment on New Year's Eve. Marches up to me with his hand held out, looking as if he'd come from London on purpose to see me. 'How are you, Warner? A happy New Year!' and so on. 'How well you are looking!' Inquires for every creature in my house. Presently asks if I can cash a cheque for him—cheque of Sir Lionel Swaynestone's, ten guineas, as good paper as the Bank of England's, of course. He wanted all gold, which we couldn't quite do, and had to send a young man to Cave's for some of it. 'This cheque is for charities in our East End parish, which is frightfully poor,' said he, and so on, and so on. 'And if you should happen by mistake to slip in an additional guinea, Warner,' says his worship, 'I'll promise you to overlook it for once.' Well, there was something in the lad's way that got the better of me, and I was weak enough to slip in the extra coin, though we make a point of keeping to local charities; and, upon my soul, I felt as if I had received the favour, not he. Those are the manners to make one's way in the world with."

"And those are the people who deserve to get on," interposed the auctioneer; "not your surly, defiant fellows, like this Everard. By George! to see him look at the witnesses. I fancy he'd like to have the physicking of some of them!"

"That's queer about the cheque," said Strutt, the tailor. "Why, he got us to cash him a cheque that same day, and would have it gold, too! Our cheque was by the Vicar of Oldport—five guineas."

"What! the same day?" asked another citizen, who had been listening. "What did he want with fifteen guineas in gold in his pocket?"

"Well," replied Strutt, "he said he couldn't bear paper; it never seemed real to him. And he got over me with his extra coins just as he did over Warner. We showed him some new patent braces. 'Dear me, Strutt!' says he, 'is it possible that you don't know that the younger clergy expect to have these things found them?' looking as grave as a judge. 'Found them, really, Mr. Maitland?' says I. 'To be sure! braces and smoking-caps, worked by devout females.' Not much to say, but the quaintness of the manner tickled me, and one of our young men laughed out. Maitland never smiled, but asked for some handkerchiefs. 'The faithful don't supply handkerchiefs, unluckily,' says he."

"He didn't look much like joking in the box, poor chap!" said Cooper, reflectively. "Wonder what he wanted with all that gold?"

"People are fond of gold, particularly ladies and clergymen," observed young West, who was still more surprised than the tradesmen at Cyril's passion for specie. He stroked his moustache thoughtfully, and wished that professional etiquette did not forbid him to relate his anecdote, which he thought might throw some light on the bag of coin found in the wood.

Cyril had visited the bank on that same day, and drawn thirty pounds on his own account. West asked him the usual question, "Notes or gold?" expecting to be asked for, perhaps, five pounds gold, and the rest paper, and looked a little surprised at the ready answer, "Gold."

Cyril laughed. "You think it odd to carry so much gold about, Mr. West?" he asked.

"It is unusual, certainly, Mr. Maitland, and, if it were known, would be dangerous."

"Oh, no one suspects a starveling curate of being overburdened with coin! A handful of sovereigns loose about me is a whim of mine. It makes me fancy myself a rich man; there is an Arabian Nights' flavour about it. What a Dives you must feel when you shovel up the sovereigns in that knowing little shovel of yours!"

Mr. West replied that he could more readily realize the sensations of Lazarus, and asked his customer if he did not frequently lose money, when he saw him carelessly drop the three little piles of gold into his waistcoat pockets.

"I might if I stood on my head," returned Cyril, "and that is not probable. If you should hear of a mild curate being murdered and robbed in the course of the next few days, you will be able to bear witness against the assassin. Nice weather for the season, isn't it? Good morning."

"Fifteen and thirty make forty-five," mused young West, "and two fellows would have at least five pounds gold more about them in the common course of things. Yet, to hear Maitland talk, you would think he never moved without his pockets full of specie. A whim of his! Clergy can lie as well as others.

"I tell you what," he added aloud, "I expect young Maitland could open people's eyes about this murder, if he cared to. Those fifteen sovereigns went into that bag, I'll lay any money."

"Not it," returned Cooper. "A fellow wouldn't ask a parson to help him in such a scrape, chum or no chum."

"He'd ask the devil himself," interposed young Durant, who was articled to his uncle, Everard's solicitor.

"In that case, he would turn to a lawyer," retorted Cooper, slily.

"Well," pursued West, "did you ever see a fellow stutter over his evidence like that? And Maitland so ready with his tongue. He was afraid of incriminating his friend, poor chap!"

"I was sorry for Miss Maitland," said Warner. "To see her tremble! Somebody said she was engaged to Everard."

"No engagement, my uncle says," replied Durant. "A pretty girl, like her brother, but older, I suppose."

"Why, they are twins! Everybody knows the Malbourne twins," said Mr. Warner. "An escape for her, if she cared for this doctor fellow. Nice girl; our people always like to serve her. Do you think they'll hang him, Strutt?"

"I tell you what," broke in Burton, the landlord: "it's no hanging business. Ten to one, Lee attacked him. In any case, there was a stiff struggle. Look at the torn coat and the black eye."

"If you try to murder me with a pint pot, Burton, and I round upon you, and hit out straight till I'm down, it's none the less murder," said another customer.

"This will be manslaughter at Belminster," said the landlord, oracularly. "Who'll bet upon it? I'll take any odds."

Even more surprised than Mr. West was Lilian, when, on her parting with Cyril on his return to his duties, he asked her to lend him a couple of sovereigns.

"Why, you extravagant boy! Have you spent all those we gave you for your parish?" she asked.

Cyril shrugged his shoulders. "You know the fellow of old, Lill, and how he scatters his coins. Only three guineas, all told, you know."

"Oh, Cyll! And Sir Lionel's ten?"

"On paper. You can't pay your railway fare with a cheque. Oh yes! scold away. I ought to have brought more money with me, I dare say. I never carry coin about, dear; too sure to lose it. But, wonder of wonders, I do chance to have a five-pound note. There!"

Cyril had repaired to the Rectory for the first time since New Year's Eve to bid his mother good-bye. He could not bear to be there after what had occurred, he said, and he especially shrank, though he did not say so, from meeting Lilian.

"Poor dear fellow! sensitive as he is, no wonder he cannot bear to be here," commented Mr. Maitland. "It is a sore trial for us all," he sighed, as Lilian turned her head away.

For he knew now of Lilian's love; she had told him all in

the terrible quarter of an hour in his study on New Year's Day, when he broke the horror of Everard's arrest to her, and she reproached him passionately for his disbelief in the innocence of the accused.

But Cyril was obliged to conquer his repugnance, and bid his invalid mother farewell, and the rush of emotion which overcame him in stepping over the threshold, so lately desecrated by Everard's arrest, was thought only natural and creditable to him. Lilian met him there, and drew him aside to her room, where Everard's gift of Guercino's Guardian Angel looked with his rapt, earnest gaze far away over the sorrowful earth to the distant heaven of joy and purity.

"Oh, Cyril!" cried Lilian, "why did you not come before? I have wanted you so. They are all against him. Every one believes him guilty but me. Tell me, dear—oh, tell me that one at least is true to him! You are his friend; you cannot think him guilty."

Cyril paused, his own emotion smothered, as it were, by this outburst of Lilian's, an outburst so foreign to her usual calm self-control and restrained strength; then he opened his arms in a rush of the old, lifelong affection, and clasped Lilian to his heart.

"I do believe in him," he said; "he is as innocent as an unborn babe. I know it—I *know* it!"

"Dear Cyril, I knew you would be true," replied Lilian. "What shall we do, Cyril? Oh! what shall we do?"

"What, indeed?" returned Cyril, overcome by the unaccustomed passion of Lilian, whose tears mingled with his own, as the twins cried in each other's arms, just as they had done in the old days of childhood.

"Keep up your heart, Lill," said Cyril, caressingly, when they had recovered themselves a little. "After all, what is it? An idiotic mistake, a foolish mare's nest, invented by these stupid rustics. A little inquiry will set all right."

"But this verdict—oh, Cyll!" exclaimed Lilian, letting her head droop once more on her brother's shoulder, and weeping afresh.

"What *is* the verdict?" asked Cyril, rather tremulously, as he stroked the rich waves of Lilian's hair, and rejoiced that she could not see his face. "Surely not——?"

"Murder," replied Lilian, in low, shuddering tones.

Cyril uttered an exclamation. Was it an oath? Lilian did not even pause to commend it to the recording angel's lenience. Blue fire shot from his eyes, and he ground his teeth.

"Asses!" he exclaimed at last. "Never mind the coroner

and his stupid verdict, darling," he added soothingly. "Coroners happily do not administer justice. A very little evidence will set things straight. Henry was not in the wood. They cannot prove him to have been in two places at once. Widow Dove being out that night was unlucky."

"Everything seems unlucky," sighed Lilian. "The stars in their courses fight against him, Cyril."

Lilian raised her head, and looked sorrowfully and appealingly, as it seemed, into her brother's eyes; and a rush of deep affection, springing from the purest sources in his nature, clouded the young man's glance, and he clasped her once more protectingly to his breast, feeling, as in the days of his spotless boyhood, that no human being could ever be so close and dear to him as this twin-sister, whose being was so closely and mysteriously interwoven with his own. All affections and ties that had since arisen seemed as nothing in comparison with this one strong bond of primal instinctive love; even the bond of marriage seemed but a secondary thing by the side of it.

The twins had drifted apart of late years. They had thought that the old childish union must naturally grow weaker with the increasing complex claims of mature life; but now they realized that it had only sunk out of sight for a time, like an underground stream, to break forth again with renewed power. Lilian's weakness and momentary self-abandonment called out all that was manliest and best in Cyril. Hers, he knew, was the deeper, stronger nature. He leant habitually on her, and now he was touched to find her leaning on him; and the tears they shed together renewed and reconsecrated the strong kinship between them, like some holy chrism.

He felt a happier and better man than he had been for many weary months after that mingling of tears, and the thought flashed through him, with a mingling of pain and sweetness, that they were too closely united not to stand or fall together; either he must drag Lilian down, or she must raise him up. Lilian would surely, he thought, as he gazed into her clear, deep, beautiful eyes, be in some way his salvation. In the mean time, he soothed and comforted her.

"You see, Lill," he said, "somebody killed poor Lee, probably by accident. And if things came to the worst with Everard, that somebody would certainly come forward and clear him."

This seemed curious reasoning, and yet it comforted Lilian strangely. "My great hope is in Alma," she said. "I am sure she can throw light upon the affair."

A hot flame shot over Cyril's face, and he turned his gaze

from his sister's and looked out of the window. "No doubt," he replied.

"And then," continued Lilian, lifting her head with a proud indignant flush, "this hideous aspersion must vanish."

"Good heavens! Lilian, do you mean that they——"

"You have not followed the evidence, Cyril?" asked Lilian. "Get the *Advertiser*, and you will see. Yes, they dare—they actually dare," she continued, drawing herself up, and walking up and down with gestures of indignant disdain, while her eyes shot forth such a stream of light as Cyril's were wont to do, "to charge him with Alma's ruin!"

The twins had been looking more alike than ever during their impassioned interview, till Lilian, in her fiery indignation, seemed like an intensified Cyril; but now the softness and calm strength, which seemed to have passed from the sister to the brother, suddenly left the latter, and his face changed and hardened, but he said nothing.

"My hope is that Alma may not die," continued Lilian, not observing him in the intensity of her passion.

"Die!" interrupted Cyril, in a deep, strange voice, while his breath came gaspingly. "Is there danger?"

"Yes; but God is good. He will not let her die till she has proved Henry's innocence."

Cyril was trembling with a terrible hope, and yet a dread of what he dared not even in thought acknowledge. He could not speak for some moments, but looked out into the chill garden, smothering this fierce emotion, and striving to stifle a wish that formed itself in spite of his better nature. At last he turned to Lilian, whose unexhausted passion continued to pour itself out in the same strain, with the radiant smile whose magnetism so few could resist.

"What idiots we are, Lill," he said, "wasting our fears upon this phantom! Old Hal will be here laughing at the absurd mistake in a week. There needs no interposition of Providence to arrange that simple matter. And, if it were not so," he added, his brow darkening, "he must be free—at any cost—at any cost," he repeated, below his breath.

"At any cost," he repeated, as he drove his father into Oldport; and he turned and looked upon the grey head by his side with a strange mixture of tenderness and dismay. Mr. Maitland was conversing cheerily as they drove along, with a view to keeping up Cyril's spirits, and carefully avoiding the subject which was uppermost in everybody's mind.

"So Marion declines to come to us," he said at last.

"Yes," replied Cyril, in the plaintive tone with which he usually discussed small annoyances: "she says that her place is at Woodlands, under present circumstances."

"Poor dear! she is a brave girl. Perhaps she is right. While George and his wife are there she will be cared for. Yes, she is right. Yet for Lilian's sake—well—— Why, Cyril lad," he added, as Cyril lifted his hat for a moment to cool his hot forehead, just as they were passing the Temple and the fatal wood above it, "that is a nasty bruise on your head! How did you get it?"

"That?" replied Cyril, replacing his hat with a smile, and gently flicking the pony into a better pace. "Oh, I did that ages ago! I ran against a door in the dark. Here are the Swaynestones. How well Ethel sits her horse! Maude is inclined to be heavy."

"Those poor Maitlands!" Maude Swaynestone was saying to her sister. "How glad Cyril must be to get back to his parish!"

"How he must hate papa!" returned Ethel, hotly, "or despise him for arresting an innocent man on such flimsy grounds!"

"My dear Ethel, your weakness for Dr. Everard carries you over the bounds of reason."

When Cyril reached the railway-station, he obtained every local paper published, and forgot to pay for them in his eagerness till gently reminded.

"Just in time, sir," the stall-keeper said, as he handed him his change. "We have no copies of the *Advertiser* left. All the papers printed double editions, too. The Everards and Maitlands are so well known in these parts."

"*Are* they?" replied Cyril, turning away with a flash of blue fire from his eyes.

"Well, I *am* blowed!" cried the stall-keeper's boy-assistant, doubled up with laughing. "If that ain't young Maitland hisself!"

Cyril's hands shook as he opened the sheets and ran his eye down the columns till he saw, in large capitals, "The Swaynestone Murder. Adjourned Inquest. Verdict." He held the paper so as to shield his face from the gaze of his fellow-travellers, and read with growing horror, until cold drops stood on his forehead, and his lips grew dry and hard.

"I never dreamed of this," he muttered. "Heaven is my witness, I never dreamed of it!"

Life seemed to him one hopeless tangle of error and misery, against which he was powerless to strive. Labyrinth after labyrinth seemed to draw him within their interminable folds, till his brain was dazed and his heart sick. Nowhere could he catch the

clue to any straight course; by no means could he unwind the deadly coil that Fate had wound so closely and thickly round him; as he thought, forgetting his own share in the work. What was the good, he wondered, of being born into a world so complex, so bewildering, so full of complicated motive and baffled purpose, so beset by the devil and all his works? He felt as weak as any weaned child, as terrified as a boy in the dark, in the presence of the gigantic evils striding upon him; his will seemed to melt like wax within him. Then he remembered Lilian in her unwonted passion, and the memory was like the balm of morning breezes through the open window of a sick-room, and he made a stand against the mental and moral swoon which threatened him. Yes, in Lilian, his better self, the saving clause of his being spoke, and he murmured to himself once more, "At any cost."

Some fresh travellers got in at Belminster, and Cyril entered into conversation with them, which became animated as they touched upon congenial topics.

"What a brilliant lad!" one of them observed to his companion, as they drove away from Waterloo; "one of the half-dozen who can talk."

"It will be all right," Cyril thought to himself, as he sped eastward in his hansom through the crowded streets; "something will turn up—some happy chance."

CHAPTER XVI.

EARLY on a bleak spring morning, cold with the bitter chill which comes only at the moment just before the dawn of day or the turn of winter, and strikes into the very marrow of the bones, Cyril Maitland was entering Belminster by the steep road descending into the ancient city from the windy downs which partially surround it.

Early as it was, he had walked far, having risen from his sleepless couch in utter restlessness, and sought to still his inward fever by bodily exercise. A cup of milk at a farmhouse, and a crust of bread, which he tried in vain to swallow, formed his frugal breakfast. He had in his hand a manual of Lenten devotion, which he could not read. His beautiful eyes were brilliant with fever, and appeared all the larger from the dark circles beneath them. "I cannot bear this much longer," he murmured to himself, as he descended the steep chalky road, and gazed mechanically on the

grey old city, with its solemn towers and buttressed minster, lying in the grey chill light beneath the leaden sky; "my brain will give way."

On the slope of the opposite hill were some large gloomy buildings, one of which, the county jail, struck upon his sense with sickening horror. Everard was there, to undergo his trial; for nothing had occurred, as Cyril so fondly hoped, to deliver him, and he was beginning to wonder if it were possible that, in spite of all the complicated machinery of English justice, an innocent man could suffer the penalty of a great crime. To-day, Cyril thought, it must be decided. If the wished-for something failed to turn up, one terrible alternative remained, and Henry must be delivered, as he had told Lilian, "at any cost."

He walked hurriedly on, as those walk who are chased by terrible cares—with something of the weary haste of wild animals ever on the alert for lurking danger—between the old-fashioned timbered cottages, stuck at picturesque angles, as if dropped by chance on the hillside, and becoming more numerous till they fell into continuous line, as he reached the bottom of the hill where the river Bele wound its quiet course through level mead and round about the old houses, which lay humbly, as it were, at the feet of the lordly cathedral and the wealthy streets of the ancient city. Here a bridge spanned the stream, and a little way back from the road stood a quaint mill, built over an archway, to admit the passage of the swift-flowing water, and overgrown on its gabled, weather-stained stone front by a vine, on which a leaf or two yet lingered, and about which pigeons clustered, hoping for sunshine, and sheltered from the bleak east wind.

Cyril seated himself on the low stone wall of the bridge, and looked down into the dark stream, on the banks of which the cottages clustered thickly at a little distance from the road. His watch told him that he had not yet consumed all the weary time, and the running water had a strange attraction for him—the idea of sinking beneath it, and being hurried on away and away for ever was so restful, though he smiled bitterly at the thought that it was scarcely deep enough to end a man's troubles. A child had been drowned there from a cottage garden the day before, but he did not know this.

The musical chimes of the city told the quarter in melodious vibrations; bugles were ringing from the barracks on the heights; the hum of busy city life was rising and deepening. When the hour struck, he would have to join Lilian and his father in the court, to watch the trial, and perhaps bear witness. He almost envied Everard his place in the prisoner's dock. He at least was

tortured by no doubts, he had no wrestlings with a weak and divided will; his course lay plain and straight before him. Many thoughts passed through Cyril's mind as he sat there, regardless of the bleak wind, and watched the unresting water, and once more he lived through the scene of the previous Sunday.

His rector, with cruel kindness, seeing that the young man was overwrought by the labours which he discharged with such apparently conscientious zeal, and tortured by anxiety for his friend, had bidden him take a little holiday, and go home to prepare himself for the ordeal of Everard's trial. Thus, on the Sunday, Cyril found himself once more in the old familiar home, now so distasteful to him through bitter associations. The Malbourne witnesses, including most of the Maitland household, were subpœnaed for the following day, and all were present at church, most of them with a lively remembrance of Cyril's sermon on Innocent's Day, when the slayer and the slain had been there also. To-day Cyril enjoyed the rare luxury of forming one of the congregation; but his father having mentioned at luncheon, with a profound sigh, that it was christening Sunday, Cyril, knowing that neither he nor Mr. Marvyn enjoyed the duty, offered to take it for him.

"They make me do nearly all the baptisms at St. Chad's," he said, smiling at the recollection of his fellow-curates' frequent requests to relieve them of this duty, "because the babies seldom cry with me. And they are not engaging babies," he added; "utter strangers to water, much less soap. We frequently have children of six or seven, and they need management."

So when the time came, Cyril rose from his place in the chancel, and walked down the church to the font, round which three infants were ranged with their sponsors. The congregation turned to the west, and Lilian watched her brother with loving reverence, as he poured the water into the font, and began the solemn service in his perfect manner, giving each word its proper weight and purest enunciation in his matchless voice, which was like an organ with many stops. The bright afternoon sun of early spring fell upon him and the pathetic little group of poor men's babes brought for his ministrations, and Lilian no longer wondered at his being chosen for the duty at St. Chad's, when she saw him bend and take the children with reverent tenderness in his arms, and, by some subtle magnetism in his touch, hush incipient wailings into peaceful, wide-eyed quiet.

The most impressive and touching of all the Church's offices, this baptismal service seemed, under Cyril's ministration, yet more solemn and pathetic, and the most unimaginative and common-

place woman, whose child was restored to her arms in that careful and dignified manner, could not but feel that something august and wonderful had befallen the unconscious infant in the interval. George Joseph, a lusty babe whose vigorous roars had occasioned his being transported three times to the churchyard, subsided into cherubic quiet after one or two rebellious efforts at a scream, which the graceful young priest soothed with scarcely perceptible gestures, and began his Christian course in a most laudable manner; then came a tiny Elizabeth Jane, who conducted herself with equal propriety. Then Cyril turned to the third infant, which he did not recognize by its friends, as he had the others.

It was carried by a widow woman, who lived alone in the village, and was known far and wide as the friend of the friendless, and the natural visitor of every house in which there was trouble of any kind; she was also the invariable sponsor of infants who conferred no credit on their friends. This child was better dressed than the cottager's children, all in white, with black ribbons at its shoulders. It was a baby that no woman, from a queen downwards, could have looked upon without longing to kiss, and was uttering various little dove-like murmurs, which occasionally rose to a crow of joy, and which the magic touch, and perhaps the glance of the priest, quieted into the softest sounds.

"Name this child," said Cyril, turning to the sponsors, and expecting to hear some feminine appellation, a female having already by mistake taken precedence of it.

"Benjamin Lee," replied the widow, in clear, high tones, which seemed to ring through the silence of the church and pierce into the very core of Cyril's heart. He staggered, and his face for a moment was whiter than the infant's dress or his own stainless robe. Not the child which St. Christopher bore on his giant shoulders pressed with a more overwhelming weight upon him than did this cooing babe, looking up with the beautiful, far-off gaze of baby innocence into his white face, press upon the shuddering arm which enfolded him.

For some seconds a dead silence, broken only by the child's happy murmurs, filled the church. The whole congregation saw the terrible emotion with which Cyril was shaken—his father, Mr. Marvyn, who was looking down pitifully from the reading-desk and reproaching himself for not having prepared his pupil, and thus saved him from the shock, the Swaynestones, the Garretts, his mother, and Lilian, all the old familiar faces; and there was a kind of sympathetic stir through the congregation, and a feeling of terror lest the poor young fellow should give way utterly, and be unable to continue the office.

But after those few seconds, which seemed an eternity to Cyril, he mastered himself with a strong effort, under the stimulus of the many-eyed sympathetic glances upon him, and, plunging his right hand into the holy water, went quietly on, "Benjamin Lee, I baptize thee," etc., with his accustomed solemnity, nor did his voice falter once till he returned the infant to its guardian's arms, adjusting its robes with his usual care as he did so; only there was a deeper meaning than ever in his voice as he spoke the pathetic words of the ritual, especially these: "that he may not be ashamed—manfully to fight under Christ's banner against sin, the world, and the devil;" and Lilian, who so seldom displayed any emotion, cried unrestrainedly at this passage.

But more than once during the remainder of the baptismal office, Cyril, instead of reading "they" and "them," for the three infants, read "he" and "him," especially at the concluding exhortation, when he looked abstractedly at the now sleeping Benjamin Lee, and said, "Ye are to take care that *this child*," etc.

Then he returned with a slow and weary step to the chancel, his gaze fixed on the pavement, and the *Nunc Dimittis* ringing in his ears, with a strange feeling of its inappropriateness—for how different was his case from that of the aged Simeon with the Redeemer in his arms!—He felt the sympathetic gaze of the congregation, who were still watching his haggard, troubled face; and sat during the sermon with that face, and all the passions which moved it, covered by the sleeve of his surplice, like that of Ulysses at the feast.

He had looked down fearfully upon the sweet baby face resting so placidly against his snowy dress, the "priestly ephod," as he had fondly called it with Keble, and his bowels yearned over the helpless creature so unconscious of its doom and of all the tragedy caused by its innocent, unwelcome existence; he looked in search of some likeness that might betray its unknown parent. Was it fancy that he seemed to see, now a look of the slain man, now a look of his own father, but on the whole and with fearful distinctness, the features and expression of Lilian? Would others see this, and would they wonder at the accidental resemblance, or did it exist only in his own overwrought, fevered fancy? He could only pray that the child might grow up with other looks; yet dared he, ought he, so to pray?

This was the scene re-enacted in his fancy, as he sat on the low stone wall and watched the river's unceasing flow, and felt no chill in the biting wind. The little head seemed to rest still on his throbbing breast; the sweet, deep eyes to gaze up into his; and the tiny dimpled fist to clutch vaguely at the folds of the priestly

garment, stirring the wildly beating heart beneath it with an emotion that was not wholly pain, while he still seemed to read those solemn words of baptismal renunciation and manful fighting under the sacred banner—words that strike with such awful reproach on the erring soldier of the cross.

Then he thought of Lilian, and his heart seemed to swoon within him; and then of Marion, the centre of all his hopes; and he could look no longer on the flowing water, but rose, suddenly conscious of the bleak wind in which he shuddered, and hurried on like one driven by thought, his eyes on the dusty road. Better, far better, it would have been to have taken the step he meditated at such dreadful cost to himself at the very first, before this fearful coil wound itself round Everard; every moment's delay made it worse, and now there was scarcely room for fate to alter things.

A beautiful music rose mellow and solemn upon his distracted ear, and floated softly over the smoke-wreathed city—the cathedral bells calling to morning prayer. Others sounded from the various churches in differing cadence, but mostly in monotone, and blended with the delicate chiming of the minster; none were silent, since it was Lent, and the melodious confusion penetrated with sweet pain the very depths of Cyril's heart. It recalled the pleasant chiming of the waggon bells as he heard them on the fatal evening which began all this trouble, and it reminded him, by its association with the cathedral, whose light flying buttresses were now springing just over his head, of all the hopes to which he was about to bid farewell for ever. Marion's charming face hovered once more smilingly before him, and a stifled sob escaped him. Not many men, he thought, had such high hopes to renounce, and he walked on up the steep street, past the quaint, arcaded houses and the delicately carved and fretted Gothic cross, a man broken in his youth, utterly wrecked at starting, with a cup to drink that was beyond his strength.

A ragged child approached him with tremulous voice and large pleading eyes, offering primroses to sell, and Cyril stopped even in his misery—for he loved children, and they loved him—to stroke its face and pity its chilled, bare limbs, and give it pence and kindly words before he hurried on. The boy somehow recalled, by his wide, clear gaze, the unacknowledged child he had baptized. Would that child be thus barefoot? he wondered. Had this boy a father who suffered him to shiver in the bitter blast? The sweet bell-music went floating drowsily on. Cyril found his father and Lilian, and finally reached the court.

The grand jury had found a true bill of murder against Everard, and he now appeared in answer to that indictment.

Lilian looked up, as Cyril dared not, when Everard entered, and walked with his usual firm step and erect bearing, but with an air of unaccustomed hauteur, into the prisoner's dock. A young emperor could not have ascended a throne with less humility or a gaze more unfaltering than that with which the usually unassuming, gentle-mannered Everard mounted the dreadful eminence of the accused criminal. He looked steadily, some said defiantly, all round the building, measuring judge and jury, counsel, and all with a comprehensive gaze; it was only when his eyes fell on the Maitlands that a hot flush sprang over his face and a quiver troubled it for a moment.

His features were sharpened by anxiety and suffering, and there were dark circles under his eyes; but the confinement had not impaired his magnificent strength, and the reporters described him as a powerful and resolute man, with a defiant air. When called upon to plead, his "*Not* guilty," with an emphasis on the negative, sounded like a challenge flung in the teeth of the whole world, which truly seemed to be arrayed against him.

The judge did not like his looks; he thought such a bearing unsuitable to an accused person, whether innocent or guilty. He looked in vain for any signs of quailing in the honest hazel eyes, full of the pride of indignant innocence. The judge's own gaze plainly expressed to those who knew the man, "This fellow will have to bite the dust."

Mr. Justice Manby was well known as a hanging judge, and, though he was as just and upright as perhaps only English judges are, he was human, and thus liable to have his judgment biased by prejudice, and he conceived a prejudice at first glance against the haughty prisoner arraigned before him. Yet he thought himself prejudiced the other way. Because he was a strong Conservative, a staunch upholder of hereditary right and class distinctions, he feared lest he should unconsciously incline to lenience towards criminals of gentle birth, and said within himself that he would not spare any for his gentleness, but rather consider how far more guilty such are than the uncultured herd, who scarcely know their right hands from their left. The jury, whose minds were full of Palmer and his diabolical strychnine poisonings, and who felt that strong measures must be taken to cripple the fearful power the doctor's position of trust and unfettered responsibility in homes gives him, were also prejudiced against him by this haughty bearing, and esteemed him to be a villain eminently dangerous to society. Truly, as Lilian said, the stars in their courses seemed to fight against Everard.

Even his counsel did not believe his statement of the facts,

and advised him very earnestly to plead guilty to the minor charge. "How can I plead guilty when I am innocent?" thundered Everard. "I tell you I never even saw the man after the Sunday, and had quite as much motive for killing you as him; indeed, more," he added, for he felt inclined to personal violence on some of those who so sorely misjudged him, particularly this barrister, who was master of the peculiar facial expression that may be called the barrister's sneer, the expression of a man who has seen too much of the wrong side of human nature. The counsel understood the flash of his client's eyes, and, when he looked at his powerful frame, was glad that he was not like the unfortunate Ben Lee, alone in a wood with him. It was his business, however, to defend the prisoner, and not to judge him, and he did his best, fettered, as a man with any conscience must be, by the belief that his cause was a bad one.

The great thing, as Cyril had suggested, was to prove an *alibi;* and to this end, Granfer, William Grove's child, Winnie Maitland —a feeble trio, truly—and Widow Dove were relied upon. The latter, to Mr. Hawkshaw's dismay, had already been subpœnaed for the prosecution, at which Everard smiled; he could not fear her. Straun, the blacksmith, who deposed to having seen Everard leaving the village in the direction of Swaynestone some time before Stevens saw him leave the Rectory by the back of the churchyard, was further reckoned a strong ally, but on being put to the test, he was fatally positive about the grey suit and the stick, and broke down utterly as to the time on cross-examination.

Then Alma was a strong tower of hope, though reckoned among the witnesses for the other side; she would at least dissipate the calumny based upon the misconceptions of Judkins and her step-mother, and would explain the nature of her meetings with Everard in the spring, when they had been accustomed to have long discussions upon Mrs. Lee's symptoms, and she would also enlighten people about those unfortunate lectures on botany which Everard now saw with remorseful humiliation to have been so injudicious.

As the trial proceeded, and witness after witness repeated or enlarged upon the former evidence, Everard realized the sensations of the man in the story, the horror of which had fascinated his childhood—of the sleeper in the ghastly four-post bedstead, the top of which slowly and remorselessly descended upon him till it threatened to become too late to escape from the narrowed aperture, and he should struggle in vain against his irresistible doom.

At first, in spite of all the annoyance and vexatious notoriety

of his unjust committal and detention, Everard had believed that it must end, after the weighing and sifting of evidence at the final trial, in his acquittal; the worst he feared was leaving the court with the stains of unrefuted suspicion upon him: but, as the trial proceeded, a terrible conviction that a miscarriage of justice might occur was slowly burnt into his soul.

The appearance of Widow Dove in the witness-box gave him a faint hope, though, having been absent from home, she could not prove his presence at her cottage; she could merely show the credibility of his tale. It was not possible, he thought, that a man, acting as he was accused of doing, would set up such a feeble pretence at *alibi* as to pretend to go to a house from which he averred the inmates were absent; it would be so very simple to upset this defence by the production of the inmates.

What was his amazement on hearing the witness quietly depose, "On December 31, I was at home all day with my daughter, who was in bed with a cold. A book-hawker called in the forenoon; no one else came to the cottage till six in the evening, when Abraham Wood looked in on his way home from work to get a light for his pipe, and had some tea." Questioned by Mr. Hawkshaw, she said that she was in the house from twelve till six, not even going into her garden all that time. Her cottage had only two rooms, with a kind of shed or lean-to, which served as scullery. Asked at what hour she lighted her candle, she replied that she did so about dusk.

The counsel did not guess what really happened—that the widow, busy in the sleeping-room with her daughter, let her gorse-fire burn out, and, being short of fuel, did not re-light it, bitter cold as it was, till she wished to boil her tea-kettle after Everard had left the dark, fireless cottage, under the impression that it was untenanted; and the poor woman's pride rendered her by no means eager to volunteer this information. The daughter corroborated her mother's statement, knowing nothing of the extinguished fire or her mother's occupation at the time of Everard's visit, that of cutting gorse-stems in the shed. Wood, the labourer, who, beguiled by the cheery glow of the widow's fire on his evening walk home, got his pipe-light and cup of tea at the cottage, gave evidence that the fire was alight. Mr. Hawkshaw thought his client a fool to invent so lame a story. Everard believed that he was under the influence of some dreadful nightmare, which must speedily end.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE Alma Lee who appeared in the witness-box was a very different being from the happy and innocent girl who rode home in Long's waggon to the music of the bells in the grey November evening, unconscious of the complicated meshes of trouble which the fates were weaving about the simple strand of her commonplace lot.

Her experience of the bitter realities of life had added a terrible lustre to her beauty, and developed her character in an unexpected direction. It was a nature, as Lilian said, full of noble possibilities and strong for good or for evil, and in its perversion it resembled some mighty stream turned aside from its natural course, and overflowing its banks in new and disastrous ways, bringing devastation where it should have brought blessing. The shame which would have crushed slenderer and sweeter natures kindled a scornful indignation in Alma, and a sense of the cruel disproportion of her punishment to her guilt—a guilt which looked angel-faced by the side of a thousand deeper sins which daily pass not only unavenged, but almost as matters of course—kindled a fierce resentment in her. Suffering had hardened her; she was a moral ruin, and when she stepped with a firm and not ungraceful carriage into the witness-box, and looked round the court with haughty defiance, every one compared her bearing with that of the prisoner, and pronounced them a pair of impenitent evil-doers.

Alma's features had lost their youthful softness and indecision of outline; they were now like chiselled marble, firm and pure and beautiful in curve. They had indeed been chiselled into shape by the sharp strokes of passion and suffering and wrong—terrible sculptors, to whom the human face is as wax ready for modelling. The dark, almond-shaped, rather melancholy eyes now burned with the fire of intense resolution; the full, rich red lips were fuller, but firmer; they met in a curve of sharpest accuracy, their former pretty wilfulness forgotten with girlhood and innocence. Her figure had expanded into a statuesque nobility, and all rustic awkwardness in her gestures was now swallowed up in the unconscious dignity of her tragic fate.

Her appearance created great surprise, and a murmur of involuntary admiration stirred the court as she entered the box, and cast her defiant glance around. It was no gentle, penitent Magdalen, as people expected, but a proud, self-reliant woman.

magnificent even in ruin. The girl in the waggon said her prayers daily, hoped for heaven, and would by no means have told a lie: so she thought, for she had never endured temptation, and had never needed to practise self-restraint in her easy, simple life, though she knew self-denial, but it was the self-denial of impulse, not principle. The woman in the witness-box still prayed—she had prayed for the death of her unborn child—but she no longer hoped for heaven. She knew that it is not for such as love man more than God, and renounce it at the bidding of another, and yet she did not repent; she knew that her brief season of evil-doing was the sweetest in her life, sweeter far than any hopes of heaven had ever been; she regretted only that it was past for ever. She was now an outcast from heaven above and from the world below, and lies were of little consequence to her.

As she stood in the witness-box, one voice rang in her ears and through her heart with these words of terror: "Oh, Alma, save me, save me! You know I never meant it!" It was almost the last voice she heard before the terrible darkness that came upon her when she felt that her hour was come, and there was no one to pity her. When at last the darkness cleared and her reason returned, that voice rang piercingly through all the chambers of her brain, awaking all the bitter misery of the past months with the added tragedy of that fatal night, and making her wish she had never been born.

But nature, so inexorably just in exacting debts, is equally just in paying them, and had in reserve an unsuspected store of wealth for the unfortunate girl. When she saw the beautiful child for whose death she had prayed, a fresh spring opened within her, and she rejoiced over him with the strong passion of her nature. Once more she had something to love and live for, to devote herself to body and soul, something entirely her own, all the more her own that he was scorned and rejected by others. Her joy in this innocent creature restored her to health of mind and body, and deepened her old, never-dying love for the man who had long ceased to love her—the man whose imploring cry, "Oh, Alma, save me, save me!" always rang in her heart.

Mr. Braxton, the counsel for the prosecution, handled this his favourite witness with the utmost delicacy of his art. To have her sworn, and say, "I am Alma Lee, etc.; the deceased, Benjamin Lee, was my father. I last saw him alive on the afternoon of December 31," was simple enough, but the difficulty was to get anything more from her. It was between four and five o'clock, she said, under the dexterous handling of Mr. Braxton—a handling fiercely criticized by Mr. Hawkshaw, and often provok-

ing a battle-royal between the counsel, and obliging Mr. Justice Manby more than once to cast his truncheon into the arena as a signal to cease fighting. She was in the wood known as Temple Copse with a friend. That friend, she admitted reluctantly at length, was her child's father; his name could in no wise be extracted from her.

"Were you in the wood by appointment?" from Mr. Braxton.

'Yes."

"Did the torn letter produced refer to the appointment?"

"Yes."

"Was it written by the prisoner?"

Furious onslaught on the part of Mr. Hawkshaw, interposition of Mr. Justice Manby, and repetition of the question in a different form.

"By whom was the letter produced written?"

Silence on the part of witness. At last, after delicate manipulation on the part of Mr. Braxton, "It was written by the person I met in the wood."

Sensation in court, which was crowded, and included a few ladies of lovely feature and rich attire.

Alma continued, amid a repetition of skirmishes between the two counsel, and many rebellions against Mr. Braxton on her own part, to give the following evidence. She had been standing on the spot where her father subsequently fell for some minutes with the mysterious friend, who was dressed in the fatal grey suit, and carried the stick produced in court. He offered her money for her child's support—a bag of gold. This she had refused many times, when her father appeared suddenly.

He carried a stick—a rough and heavy staff, fresh cut from the hedge—was angry and excited, dashed the bag of gold to the ground, stamped on it, and began upbraiding the young man. He ordered his daughter to leave them, and she did so. She waited outside the copse, listening, and fearful that something would happen. She heard voices indistinctly, and at last sounds like men struggling. She turned faint, and when she recovered a little there was silence.

She was returning to the wood, when a figure rushed towards her, bleeding in the face, the grey suit torn and stained, and covered with brambles and dead leaves. He said—here the witness broke down, and wept so bitterly that she could not speak for some time—he said that he had killed her father by an accidental blow that he had given in defending himself; that Lee had assaulted him with great violence, of which he bore the mark; and at last he entreated her to save him. "I promised that I

would never betray him," said Alma, with calm simplicity, as she drew her black drapery round her, "and I never will." She related further that she bid him leave the spot quickly, before her mother returned from Malbourne and met him, and that he did so; and that she herself regained her home as quickly as possible, and went to bed, being very ill, and knew and heard nothing of the search for and discovery of her father's body until her partial recovery weeks later.

The evidence of Judkins was fuller than that he gave at Oldport. He deposed to seeing Alma enter the wood shortly before Everard entered it from the opposite direction. Ingram Swaynestone also witnessed to seeing her, or rather a female form which he supposed to be hers, among the hazels which bordered the copse, as he rode up the meadow before he met the grey-suited figure. Swaynestone had often seen the two together in the spring, knew that Everard visited Mrs. Lee twice a day, and had seen Alma accompany him on his homeward way some distance, in earnest conversation with him. Judkins, in describing these meetings, said, in the witness-box, "They walked slow and strolling, like people who keep company."

All this Alma admitted. Dr. Everard made her accompany him through a field or two sometimes, she said, that she might have fresh air, which, he said, she needed. He used to give her directions about her mother, and receive her account of her symptoms; he used also to ask her about plants, explain them to her, and ask her to procure him specimens. They could not say much respecting the symptoms before the woman who helped to nurse Mrs. Lee, because she was indiscreet, and told all to the patient. Dr. Everard had given her a book or some trifle every Christmas since she was six or seven years old.

Alma was told of the peril of concealing a felony, she was threatened with committal for contempt, she was informed that she became an accessory to her father's death after the fact if she continued to conceal the name of his murderer; but she was stubborn, trembling and turning pale at the words "accessory after the fact." She was further told that her oath required her not only to say whether or no the prisoner was the man who dealt the fatal blow, but to reveal the name of the actual murderer, supposing the accused to be innocent.

Alma trembled more and more as her examination proceeded; the heavy air made her giddy and faint, and the unaccustomed excitement and agitation of her terrible position confused her faculties. To the question, "Had the prisoner on leaving the wood, the stick produced in his hand?" she replied, "No; he

was wringing his hands," and she made similar slips; and, finally, to the question, "Is the man who met you in the copse the prisoner in the dock, or some other man?" she replied, with a sob and a shudder, in words that thrilled every ear in the building, "It is the prisoner."

When Everard heard these fatal words, he trembled so that he seemed about to fall; the sweat of agony stood on his brow and dabbled the short, curly brown hair that he had pushed over it in the growing agitation of Alma's evidence; and the eyes with which he gazed upon the pale and shuddering witness had a dazed and filmy look. In one moment the real truth flashed upon him, illuminated by the lightning of Alma's passionate glances, and the whole history arranged itself dramatically before him in its minutest details with a vivid distinctness that never more left him.

Glimpses of truth more bitter than death to believe had come upon him many a time before, only to be driven away by the scornful incredulity of a loyal and generous nature. As the evidence developed before him, these glimpses became more frequent and more difficult to combat, though the hateful suspicions were never dwelt upon; but now, in that moment of vivid, heart-piercing revelation, every little suspicious circumstance, unnoticed at the time, rose up with magic swiftness, and fitted into its natural place in one long and unbroken chain of perfectly sequent, convincing evidence. Words, gestures, accents, once regarded in such different lights, now showed clear in one lurid flame; widely floating reminiscences, conjectures, hypotheses rushed together in a coherent whole, and an awful sense of the mystery of human iniquity caused Everard's soul to swoon within him. A faint groan escaped him, audible, low as it was, in the startled, momentary silence of the court.

"There is no God," he said within himself; "there is no good, no help anywhere."

After this, the trial, which was virtually at an end, seemed to have no further interest for him. He stood in his dreadful place like one crucified, and listened abstractedly to the further proceedings—Alma's cross-examination, Mr. Braxton's triumphant, "That, my lord, closes the evidence for the prosecution," Mr. Hawkshaw's laboured and lame address, the few and feeble witnesses for the defence and the judge's able and comprehensive summing-up—with a listless face and a soul full of darkness.

Cyril was not in court when Alma's examination was thus concluded. He had listened to part of it on the previous day, and then rushed away, unable to bear it. On this morning he had felt unequal to hearing more, and a friend, seeing his con-

dition of mental unrest, had recommended him to try a brisk walk, promising to tell him what passed whenever he should return to the vicinity of the court. Cyril wandered restlessly about, more haggard and feverish than ever, trying to brace himself to the performance of his obvious and long-neglected duty, and yet, with the unreason of weak and sanguine temperaments, hoping against hope that something might still turn up to absolve him from the necessity before which every fibre of his being shuddered in mortal anguish.

The old-fashioned streets seemed to him like the architecture of dreams, and the figures hurrying to and fro had no more reality for him than the flitting phantoms of a nightmare. The blood throbbed in his temples like the piston of a steam-engine; he wondered how his brain had borne its dreadful pressure so long. He wandered into the sweet, sunny stillness of the Close, and strove to calm himself by the peaceful suggestions and hallowed associations of the semi-monastic spot. The voices of children at play came harmoniously over the wall of the canons' gardens; some quietly dressed ladies went by; the dean issued from beneath the lovely pointed arches which formed a porch to the Deanery, and walked with a dignified quiet, free from loitering, across the sunshiny grass. Cyril looked wistfully at his bland, wholesome, yet delicate face, and remarked to himself on the peculiarly English combination of piety and aristocracy which is the special note of the higher ranks of Anglican clergy, and wondered whether piety or aristocracy were the larger ingredient in the mixture so pleasing to some minds. Years afterwards he recalled these idle reflections, as people recall the trifles which belong to the critical moments of life and become stamped upon the memory along with the crises themselves. The rooks were busy in the great leafless elms, sailing across the blue sky or clustering about the boughs with a confused, reiterated cawing, which recalled the breezy downs of home and the white peace of boyhood.

The massive cathedral looked solemnly peaceful in the bright, cold, spring sunshine, which made the flying buttresses and other salient points cast sharply cut shadows on its grey surface. It seemed to offer peace to Cyril's distracted soul, and he left the sunshine and entered the vast building, soothed for a moment by its shadowy echoing stillness. Some idea of betaking himself to prayer possessed him, but he could not collect his thoughts, and he rose from his knees and paced the echoing aisles, looking up, as if for help, into the deep shadow of the arched roof. Some organ notes soon soared thither—a brief prelude; then Mendelssohn's air, "If with all your hearts ye truly seek Me." His fancy

supplied the mellow pathos of a tenor voice to the lovely melody, and he stood beneath the solid arches of the great Norman transept, wistful and hushed for a moment.

"Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" he echoed.

The air died away, and, after a brief pause, one of Bach's magnificent fugues was thundered forth in complex, ever-increasing majesty, till it seemed charged with the agony and passion and exultation of some great war of young and mighty nations, full of the "confused noise and garments rolled in blood," which belong to the warrior's battle. The tumult echoed through all the recesses of Cyril's being; it gave an outlet to the stormy agitation within him. He surrendered himself to the full power of the mighty harmony, glad to lose himself, if but for a moment. But the conflict of the contrapuntal parts harmonized too well with the conflict in his soul; it was no longer a battle of the warrior, but a strife of powers, celestial and infernal.

He covered his face with his hand, leaning against a pillar, and seemed to see countless legions of warring angels flash in glittering cohorts over the universe, and then to hear the crash of the countercharge of the dusky armies of hell. Now the bright-armoured squadrons are driven back, and Cyril's heart shakes within him. Is hell stronger than heaven? Shall wrong conquer right? Michael, the Prince himself, is driven back, and the fiend, with the face of marred but never-forgotten glory, is triumphant. But no; the adamantine swords flash out again, the dazzling wings cleave the blue ether, and the vast squadrons of dusky horror are driven back—back into endless abysses of chaotic night.

The angel trumpets peal out in heart-stirring triumph, the music ceases, and Cyril is left alone, his cheek pressed against the chill, rough stone, and hot tears rushing down his face. Was the angel combat for a human soul? or was all that tumult of war only the strife within one narrow human breast? In that case, he felt he was undone—his will was too weak; evil was too strong for him. He could find no peace, even in that holy place. He turned and paced rapidly down the long nave, and offered to a stray sightseer, in his abstraction, the striking spectacle of an ascetic-looking young clergyman wearing his hat in a cathedral.

"Young man," said the stranger, solemnly accosting him, "are you aware that this building is consecrated?"

Cyril flushed, and tore off his hat, murmuring some words of explanation. Then he rushed out into the sunshine, where he met his friend, evidently big with tidings.

"Well?" he asked, his lips growing dry with apprehension.

"Well, Maitland, I am afraid it is all up with the poor fellow. There is no doubt now; Alma Lee has confessed all."

"All?" asked Cyril, steadying himself against the stone lintel of the side door.

"Yes. She was outside the copse. She heard a struggle; Everard rushed out, covered with blood, and said he had accidentally struck the fatal blow in self-defence, and implored her to save him."

"Everard? Did she swear that Everard did it?" asked Cryil, in a strained, unmusical voice.

"Yes; she swore to him at last. Not that any one ever had the slightest doubt. Poor fellow! he should have pleaded guilty. After all, what is accidental homicide in self-defence?"

"What indeed!" returned Cyril, in the same strange voice, with an unusual look in his face.

He was silent for a while, and his friend said nothing, sympathizing with his trouble. Then he pulled himself from the lintel with an effort, and walked quickly away. "I must go to the court at once," he said, with quiet determination.

"I would stay away, if I were you," said the friend, accompanying him nevertheless. "After all," he added, with blundering attempts at consolation, "the poor fellow has not been to blame. As for that entanglement, Maitland, you must not judge it from a clerical point of view. The world smiles on these youthful follies. As a medical man in practice, it would have gone against him; but then, he is not yet in practice, and every one knows that young blood is not iced. His blunder was in denying it. If he had but pleaded guilty, Manby would have let him down easily enough. Such a magnificent girl, too! Few men but Braxton would have dragged it out of her. She looked like death when she said it. You see, she had sworn to shield him. Fancy letting that out in the witness-box!"

"You see," interrupted Cyril, suddenly—for this kind of talk was more than he could bear—"I *am* a clergyman, and must look at these things from a clerical point of view."

Cyril's very slight evidence had not been of sufficient importance to be repeated at the trial; Lilian's was, however, deemed important from its very feebleness and the evident reluctance with which she gave it. Mr. Braxton was so very sarcastic about her reasons for disbelieving the evidence of her senses, that even Mr. Justice Manby, who was human, and touched by Lilian's gentle and sorrowful dignity—not to speak of her youth and beauty—threw the ægis of his office over her, and pronounced Mr. Braxton's observations to be irrelevant.

The other witnesses merely repeated what has already been recorded, though with more detail, and all stood cross-examination well. Mr. Hawkshaw's endeavours to show that Judkins's suspicions of Everard were but the forgeries of jealousy, served only to fasten the imputation more deeply upon the accused. The feigned handwriting was pronounced by experts to be that of Everard; they relied greatly upon the formation of a capital T, which was made in the French manner, . Everard smiled mournfully when he heard this. He thought of the far-off school-time, when he and the twins had been first puzzled and then enchanted by their French teacher's T's; he thought of one wet afternoon, when they got a gridiron and heated it red-hot, and had a mock-masonic initiation, of which the house-dog, Rover—swathed in a dressing-gown, and occasionally uttering whines of remonstrance—was Grand Master; and how they vowed absurd vows, one of which was to be ever-faithful to the persecuted French T. He recalled a solemn discussion at the end of the initiation as to the amount of guilt which would be incurred by either of the twins in breaking their vows. Cyril argued that neither of them could singly commit more than half a crime; and Henry replied that in that case neither ought singly to eat more than half a dinner. All this happy and guileless fooling enacted itself again in Everard's memory while his fate was being decided in the serious strife of the barristers, who pleaded for and against his innocence, and made him feel, like Francesca da Rimini in hell, that "there is no greater pain than remembering happy times in misery."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Every one felt the defence to be a mere farce, insufficient to kindle interest, much less hope, even in the prisoner. Little Rosalia Grove, the child who saw and spoke with Everard at Long's farm between five and six on the evening of the 31st, was but five years old, and, on being produced in the town hall at Oldport, did nothing but weep bitterly and cling to her father for comfort. His caresses and remonstrances failed to extract anything from her. He could only depose that she had shown him a penny just given her by "a man," when he came in to tea at six; that she said that the man wanted Dr. Everard's parcel, which she had seen her mother take to the Rectory.

The appearance of Winnie Maitland's golden curls in the

witness-box touched people and kindled deep indignation in the breasts of both judge and jury, who thought the child had been practised upon. Her first performance was to cry with fright, though she stated her name and age distinctly, and took her oath properly. She understood the nature of an oath, she said; her sister Lilian had explained it to her, and enjoined her to be very careful in what she said. On being asked what she supposed would be the consequence of her swearing carelessly, she replied that "Henry would be hanged," an idea she had imbibed from Lennie, during many anxious consultations with him.

She did not know exactly at what time Everard returned to the Rectory; it was "about tea-time." She did not know what clothes he wore; he was in a great hurry to go upstairs, to get ready for dinner. She told him there was no hurry, as it was long before dinner-time; but he replied that he was not fit to go into the drawing-room. Cross-examined, she said he was "in a dreadful mess," words used by Everard. She pleaded for "just one toss," and he threw her up in the air and caught her several times. She did not remember striking him, or coming in contact with him. The hall in which the playing took place was not well lighted.

All of a sudden he set her down, and said, "You have done it now; blinded me." She cried, and made him promise not to tell; she was always getting into trouble for rough play. He went into the kitchen, and came out again with raw beef. She followed him to his room, and he showed her some flowers, and told her to take them to her sister, and "not to come bothering him any more." She was trying so hard to play gently, and she did not know she touched him. His eye was very bad, but he did all he could to hide it, and said at dinner that he had knocked it against something.

Granfer, who entered the witness-box with a vague notion that his conversational powers had at last a worthy sphere, repeated what he said at Oldport with the same circumlocution and affectation of stupidity, and parried Mr. Braxton's questions, and dealt him cutting rejoinders, with an apparent absence of malice that drove the Court into ecstasies of mirth.

Mr. Maitland and others bore witness to Everard's good reputation, and also to the frankness with which he spoke of his visits to Mrs. Lee in the spring—a circumstance which the counsel for the defence maintained to be incompatible with Judkins's suspicions as to the purpose of those visits.

After listening to Mr. Hawkshaw's laboured, impassioned, but totally illogical speech for the defence, no creature in the court

had the faintest hope for the prisoner; the only question now was the sentence. Yet there was one who dared to rely upon the summing-up, and hope that Mr. Justice Manby would discover some technical flaw which might afford a loophole for escape. This person was Cyril Maitland, who had set out from the cathedral with such intense determination, but whose courage had failed him at first sight of the judge and that terrible array of human faces, which, to his excited imagination, seemed eager, with a wolfish hunger, for the shame and misery of a fellow-creature. There stood his friend, pilloried before him, the prey of those hungry glances. Cyril's heart bled for him, but he felt that he could never stand there in his place. That Everard's head was bowed and his eyes cast down beneath that tempest of shame was only natural; who could stand before it?

The judge's summing-up was brief, terse, and convincing. He had merely to recapitulate the clear and undisputed evidence —the plea of *alibi* was contradicted by Widow Dove's evidence; the argument that the prisoner was not the man whom so many witnesses had seen returning to the Rectory at five, but that he was at that moment speaking to Granfer at the wheelwright's corner, was quickly set aside; the evidence of the aged, semi-imbecile creature was scarcely to be relied on against that of so many competent witnesses, including the one who had given evidence with such reluctance; the attempt to turn the innocence of two young children to his own purposes was spoken of in scathing terms; the prisoner's nervous and excited behaviour on the evening of the occurrence and his garbled account of his injury and strenuous attempts to conceal it were pointed out; the jury were finally exhorted to concentrate their minds upon the question whether the prisoner did or did not kill Benjamin Lee, regardless of all other considerations, and to allow no thoughts of his previous unblemished reputation or tenderness for his rank and prospects to interfere with their judgment. They were to consider, the judge said, that although the consequences of such a crime were undoubtedly tenfold more terrible to one in the prisoner's station than to an uneducated man, yet the guilt of one with such advantages was tenfold greater.

When Mr. Hawkshaw heard this, he knew that not only would the jury return a verdict against his client, but that the judge would give him a severe sentence. Yet Cyril hoped; he remembered that there were twelve men in the jury.

But he did not hope long; a few seconds brought the unanimous verdict. Guilty of manslaughter — a verdict hailed by a quickly stifled murmur of approval from the crowded court.

Like a man suddenly stabbed, Cyril sprang to his feet, throwing up his arms as men only do in uncontrollable agony, and addressed some wild words to the judge. "Stop!" he cried; "I have evidence—important evidence. The prisoner is innocent!"

Mr. Justice Manby, who heard merely a confused outcry, ordered Cyril's removal; Mr. Maitland, thinking his son distracted, pulled him down, and strove to quiet him; there was an attempt to remove him, which was met by promises of good behaviour on the part of those around him; and, quiet having been procured, and Everard, who in his bewilderment scarcely heard the question asked him whether he had anything to say, having at last replied in a dazed way, "I am not guilty," the judge proceeded to give sentence in the usual form, but with some amplification.

"Henry Oswald Everard, you have been found guilty," he said, "of a very cruel and pitiless crime; whether it was a murder committed by deliberate and malicious intention or merely a homicide done in the heat of anger after considerable provocation is known only to yourself and your Maker. By the laws of your country you have been convicted of the lesser crime, and it is my duty to sentence you for that crime." He went on to say how very painful he found that duty, and to expatiate upon the prisoner's advantages, his education and social standing, the manner in which he was trusted and admitted to the poor man's home. He spoke of the dead man's integrity, of his only child's fair fame and defenceless condition, and pointed out the great wickedness and cruel meanness of the prisoner's conduct with regard to her, and dwelt much upon the father's grief and just anger. He spoke also of the prisoner's youth and strength, and contrasted these with Lee's comparative age and stiffness; he alluded to the prisoner's anatomical knowledge which taught him how to deal the fatal blow. Those who knew Mr. Justice Manby had seen him come down hard upon prisoners before, but they had never known him so hard. He had once given a wife-killer, a man who had put the climax to years of cruel torture by stamping a little too hard on his slave and killing her, five years, and people had been aghast; precisely similar cases in other parts of the country had got six weeks or a twelvemonth, or even two years. But recently the papers had been sarcastic upon the wife-beaters' short sentences and upon a prevailing tone of Victor-Hugo sentimentality towards criminals, and Mr. Justice Manby had felt the righteousness of their strictures, and remembered them in dealing with Everard. "I shall therefore give you," he concluded, "the severest sentence which the law allows—twenty years penal servitude."

The sentence fell upon Everard like a blow; he staggered under it, swerved aside, and clutched at the woodwork of the dock to steady himself, while hot drops sprang upon his brow. At the same instant, as if under the same blow, a cry rang through the court, and a man fell down senseless. It was Cyril Maitland.

Everard lifted his head at the cry, and saw what happened, scarcely heeding it in his agony; he saw Lilian, marble pale, but quiet, catch her brother in her arms, and that touched him with an ineffable pity for her through his desperate anguish.

Then he was taken from his pedestal of shame, and led away into the terrible darkness of twenty years' ignominy and hopeless suffering, bereft at one stroke of everything, name, fame, fortune (for in those days a felon's property was forfeited), love, liberty, and hope.

In a moment he saw his life as it was but yesterday, before Fate wove its dreadful mesh round him—a life of honourable and useful toil, full of noble ambition, beautiful enthusiasm, and honest striving; rich with the promise of love and domestic peace; happy with friendship and family affection; adorned with culture and scientific research; and rich, above all, with trust in human goodness and divine mercy. He was now bereft of all, even of his faith. God, if there were a God, had forsaken him; man had betrayed and deserted him. The remembrance of Cyril's almost feminine piety sickened his soul. He saw him kneeling before the picture of the Crucifixion with deadly guilt upon him; heard him leading the simple family worship on the day when he went forth in treachery to take the life of a man he had wronged; heard his impassioned, half-hysterical sermon on Innocents' Day; saw him dealing the very Bread of Life to himself and Lilian; remembered the message he had sent him during his detention, "He shall make thy righteousness clear as the light, and thine innocence as the noonday;" and broke forth in curses on all canting hypocrites who make religion a cloak for evil deeds.

And he had loved this man so well, trusted and revered him, fed his soul on his moral beauty. That was the sharpest stab in the confusion of pain that poured upon him. And Marion loved him, and Lilian, and the guileless family at Malbourne; and if Cyril should turn and repent even now at the eleventh hour, what would come of it but shame and misery to those he loved so tenderly? Should he denounce him himself—he, the convict? No; that would only double the anguish of all those innocent hearts, and perhaps avail nothing. If he had but suspected before! but now it was too late.

Soon he would stand in his gaoler's presence, stripped of his

very garments, no longer a man, but a thing; called no more by a name, but a number; beggared in mind, body, and soul; and a stony despair possessed him. Mr. Hawkshaw thought he might get five years, he told him, and five years, or even ten, left some small room for hope. After five years, youth would not be utterly gone; he might still bridge over the gap in his life. He might go to some new world and begin over again, wasted by imprisonment, with five precious years lost, but still in the prime of his faculties. But twenty years shut out all hope—twenty years of early manhood and maturity, cut off from all sources of mental activity, from all knowledge of the world and life, the echoes of whose onward rolling wheels could never reach him; chained to manual toil; herded with the scum and off-scouring of vice and misery. Supposing that he survived this awful fate, what could he expect to be at the end?

He was glad now that none of his friends save Mr. Maitland and George Everard had seen him since his arrest. His fate was beyond the reach of sympathy or help; the only thing now was to keep its contamination to himself. He refused to take leave of any one. George had irritated him by untimely exhortations, by gifts of tracts, and a disbelief in his innocence, or rather, a stubborn assumption that he was guilty on all counts, which astonished him beyond measure; Marion sent her love, and would see him "if he wished;" his father and two brothers were still abroad; and his married sisters agreed with their husbands that Henry was dead to them.

But Mr. Maitland procured an interview after the conviction, and was accompanied by Lilian. The meeting was brief and agonized. Lilian's marvellous self-control kept her outwardly calm, while the calm of utter despair quieted Everard. He bid her forget him, think of him as dead; reminded her that she had her life to live in the outside world; and hoped she would open her heart to newer and happier affections. Lilian replied that she never could and never would forget the one love of her life; that the cruel fate which separated them for twenty years could not cancel the bond between them, which was eternal. "Besides," she added, with a sorrowful smile, "your innocence may yet be proved."

"My poor Lilian," he returned, thinking how bitter such a proof would be for her, "we must not venture to hope for that."

"I shall pray for it night and day," replied Lilian; "and, in the mean time, do not forget me, Henry. Remember the morning in the wood, and all that you promised me."

He turned his face away, and could not speak for some time;

and Lilian continued in her quiet way to tell him how grieved Cyril would be to have missed seeing him, and how terribly he had suffered by his friend's calamity. Lilian had only left his bedside for the short time granted her to bid farewell to Everard, for Cyril was at death's door. He had not ceased raving since he recovered from the fainting-fit into which the passing of Everard's sentence threw him. All this Everard heard with the same stony calmness, which was shaken only by the ineffable pity he felt for Lilian. It would be better for her if Cyril should die, he thought, though for himself it would cut off the last possibility of escape from dishonour. He sent a tender message to Marion, thanked Mr. Maitland for all his kindness, and then it was time for his friends to go.

"I shall never forget you, Henry," Lilian said, as their hands were clasped in a last farewell. "I have but one life and one love. Twenty years' suffering will not make me love you less. I can never forget you—never."

Lilian's firm lip quivered, as she spoke these words in a voice the natural music of which was enhanced by the deepest mingling of love and sorrow, and the quiver recalled to Henry's mind the pitiful trembling he had often seen in Cyril's mouth, the sign of a fatal inherent weakness of purpose. The sharpening of her features and the pallor consequent on mental suffering and intense emotion, further increased Lilian's likeness to her twin brother, and Everard felt his heart rent in twain by a tumult of conflicting feelings as he took his last long look at the sorrowful, beloved face.

He could reply only by a look which haunted Lilian ever after, and by a closer pressure of the beautiful adored hand, and then he heard the doors shut with a dreadful heart-crushing sound behind her.

In that moment of exquisite anguish his stony despair gave way, for the farewell between true lovers can never be all pain, and a holier though deeper agony shook his heart, mingled with a rush of the old pity and affection for his friend, and a thousand thoughts and feelings poignant with joy as well as sadness, and he dropped his head upon his hands and cried as Englishmen, and even English boys, rarely cry. He never shed such tears again, though the time came when he would have given worlds for the power of such a passionate outburst.

Lilian also broke down when the door closed upon the unfortunate prisoner, and wept, regardless for once of her father's feelings, unrestrained by the presence of the stolid and indifferent prison officials, to all of whom a woman's tears were a too-familiar sight.

until she regained her brother's room, and took her part in placing ice on his burning head, and listening to his incessant ravings of battles and music and churches, and his frequent calls to Lilian to protect him from some shadowy and awful terror. Then Lilian would lay her hands gently and firmly upon him, and tell him she was there, and nothing should hurt him; and then sometimes a dim glimmering of consciousness would return to his wild and vacant gaze for a moment, and he would be quieter for a time; till at last, after a long and weary time, one day, when Lilian felt that her strength was quite at an end, he looked up with a glance of recognition and spoke her name.

Then they were told that he would live, but whether his reason would ever return to him depended greatly upon his treatment during convalescence.

PART II.

"A peace above all earthly dignities,
A still and quiet conscience."

CHAPTER I.

THE full glory of late summer brooded in afternoon stillness over the golden harvest-fields, the grey dreamy downs, the deep-shadowed woods, and the soft azure glimpses of sea around Malbourne. Everything seemed wrapped in rich, delicious luxury. Improvident boys revelled in blackberries, and stormed their friends' heavily laden fruit-trees; while provident squirrels watched the swelling acorns and hazel-nuts, and prepared little granaries for storing them when ripe. The sun had drawn the richest tones of colour from everything—from the ruddying apple and purpling plum; from the brown-gold corn and brilliant wayside flowers; from the dark green woods and purple clover patches; from the bronzed faces and limbs of the labourers and children; from the cottage gardens, bright with scarlet-runner, vegetable marrow, and rich fruit. Passing down the village street, you could scarcely see the thatched cottages for the flowers about them, the gay hollyhocks standing like homely sentinels among the red snapdragons, geraniums, carnations, and gillyflowers; while the Rectory grounds were gay with their fullest bloom, and the redspur valerian climbed over the low churchyard wall, and red poppies blazed through the corn, which stood ready for the sickle on the other side.

The yellow lichens and stonecrop on the grey spire and tiled roof of the church glowed intensely in the sleepy sunshine, into which a warm haze had brought a ruddy tint, and the blue sky gazed, softened and dreamy, through the same hazy veil. Down from the belfry, standing there in the sweet blue, fell the slow, drowsy chime of the three old mellow bells, and floated pleasantly over the quiet, basking fields, where cows stood withdrawn beneath the trees, chewing contentedly, with lazily winking eyes and whisking tails; and the horses fed serenely, not knowing that they would have to drag all that rich harvest home before long; and the little brook babbled faintly, because of the great heat which consumed it.

Service was over, and people were straggling home through fields or lounging at garden gates in idleness and Sunday clothes, though the full male toilet was subdued by a tendency to shirt-

sleeves. Granfer was holding forth to a select circle outside the low wall of the churchyard, where he was wont to bask in the sun, like some novel species of lizard, the summer long. Farmer Long was wending his way slowly homewards with his family, full of thought. He had decided to cut his first wheat-field, half a mile off, on the morrow, and lo! he saw that the corn through which they were passing was over-ripe and crying out for the sickle.

Farmer Long was puzzled. He could not think why Providence made the corn ripe all at once, when it was obvious that it could not all be cut, much less carried, at the same time. "You may depend upon it," his wife told him, "Providence have got plenty to do without thinking o' your carn, Long. Cutting of it and carrying is our look-out. All Providence have to do is to put it there for us, and thankful we must be there's any to cut." Which Mr. Long reflected upon over his pipe after tea, not without a remote inward conviction that he would have made better arrangements himself.

Sunday afternoon is the great time for sweethearting. Many a shy couple detached itself from the straggling parties going homewards, and wandered off through wood and field-paths and green lanes, for the most part silent, but contented, if not happy, and full of more unspoken poetry than the world dreams of.

It is a melancholy time for the forsaken or scorned swain, who cocks his felt hat in vain, and whose bunch of carnation or hollyhock, jauntily stuck in his hatband, avails him nothing in the eyes of the cruel fair. It was the hour when Charles Judkins's misplaced passion gave him the most exquisite pangs; an hour which he usually spent in solitary brooding, chiefly by the brookside, where he was wont to lean on a certain stile, shaded appropriately by willows, and "pore upon the brook that babbled by," just like the unfortunate youth in Gray's "Elegy." And let no prosaic child of culture, who has outlived the young days when there was nothing so sweet as the misery of crossed love, think scorn of our friend, or laugh at true love because it wears livery and top-boots. A garb more antipathetic to romance than that of a spruce groom's livery scarcely exists, but it could not kill the romance in Charlie Judkins's honest breast. He was dreaming of what might have been but for the sin of one bad man.

A pretty cottage filled his mind's eye, a cottage with a porch and honeysuckle and roses, standing in a garden, not too far from the Swaynestone stables, with beehives and flowers, and fruit, and vegetables, all grown by himself in leisure hours. He pictured to himself the neat parlour, with a clock, a sofa, and a carpet. In a low chair, by the window or fire according to season, he saw

a beautiful woman, with rich, dark eyes which brightened at his step, and damask cheeks which took a deeper glow at his return. There she would be with her needle, busy, happy, honoured, loving, and loved.

Charlie's eyes clouded with tears so that the vision vanished, and only the brown brook, with its imprisoned sunbeams, met his sorrowful gaze. But the Malbourne bells pealed drowsily on, as he had so often dreamed they would peal for his wedding, when he should issue from the familiar porch, the proudest and happiest of men, with Alma—dear Alma—in all her rich beauty, on his arm.

He turned hastily away, dashing the foolish moisture from his honest blue eyes, and struck aimlessly along the footpath, thinking how her life, sorely awry as it was, might yet be put straight. "If I could only see her happy and respected again!" was his thought, as he strode along, consumed by no selfish grief. Presently he stopped at a gate, half overgrown with briar and hawthorn, and saw a sight which filled him with the tenderest emotion.

On the other side of the brook, in a grassy corner between a coppice and a field of ripe wheat which rose upwards from the banks of the little stream, was Alma herself, sitting on a felled tree, and watching the play of a child at her feet on the grass. Her shawl and bonnet were thrown aside, and her plain, well-fitting, black dress showed her beautiful form to the best advantage. There was now a statuesque majesty about her which matched well with the tragedy never absent from her proud, defiant eyes. That habitual expression which goes so far towards making up the identity of a human being was so changed in Alma, and her features were so sharpened by her terrible experience of life, that to any eye but that of love she was no longer the same girl as she who had ridden home in the grey winter gloaming, happy and innocent, to the rustic music of the waggon-bells.

The dark green of the coppice and the deep gold of the corn rising behind her gave her a picturesque background, while the beautiful boy playing in the grass at her feet made such a foreground as any artist must have loved. The child was dressed daintily in white, with blue ribbons, and with wreaths of pink convolvulus wound about him. Alma had placed a bunch of scarlet poppies in her own dress to attract his eye, and was looking at him with a mournful, impassioned gaze, while he held up a tiny finger and bid her hark to the music of the wedding-bells which were ringing to honour the return of Cyril Maitland and his young bride to England and to Malbourne, where they arrived only the night before.

Two springs had scattered flowers on Ben Lee's untimely grave

in Malbourne Churchyard, two summers had thrown their golden glory upon it, and the months which softened the hard letters on his headstone, and braided the turfy mound above him with mosses, had strengthened and developed the round limbs and brought intelligence to the bright eyes of the second Ben Lee, whose innocent life began so dolorously where his grandfather's had ended tragically.

It pleased Alma to fancy resemblances to her father in the infant's sweet face, and the tenderest feeling in her life now was the occasional fancy that the child's beauty and pretty ways might have softened her father's heart, and perhaps have induced him to pardon the dishonour she had brought on his honest home. She dreamed of their going away to some new place, where they were not known, and where she might pass as a widow, and do her best to atone for the evil past. Or, at least, he might have loved the child, if he could not have forgiven her.

But harder and more bitter thoughts were passing through Alma's mind as she sat by the brook that sunny afternoon, and smiled mournfully on the laughing child and heard his soft prattle mingled with the babbling brook's slow song and the lingering chime of Cyril Maitland's wedding-bells.

She was thinking how she would like to go away, far away to some unfamiliar land, where her sin and sorrow were unknown, and where she might begin life afresh, and earn a good name and honourable up-bringing for her son. Her step-mother had, as she expressed it, washed her hands of her after her father's death, and she lived alone in a humble cottage lodging, trying to earn her bread by her needle, or, indeed, by any industry that lay within her power, and hoping in time to live down her reproach.

But it was not so easy to get work in Malbourne. All classes shunned her; even the gentle Rector, who would otherwise have given her a helping hand, could not overcome his horror of the woman who had betrayed Henry Everard to so terrible a fate, and wished her away from his parish, offering, indeed, to help her, if she would but go.

Still Alma clung to the spot which held her parents' graves, and fought manfully against the wall of prejudice which rose around her, eating the bread of tears and bitter humiliation in secret, though she met the averted faces or contemptuous words of her former friends with heroic calm in public, but got scarcely any work. Ben Lee had put by a considerable sum of money for one in his station, and this was divided by his will between his wife and his daughter. Upon this little capital Alma had been living, till she woke to the mournful conviction that there

was no bread for her to win in Malbourne, and also that a day would soon come when her patrimony would be exhausted.

Money found its way mysteriously to her cottage—money from a source well known to her—for the child's support; but Alma scorned to use it, and, being unable to return it without betraying the giver, put it aside for the infant's use in case of her death or any emergency. Like most women of any force of character, who are thrown on their own resources, after a time she began to realize how feeble a being one woman is against a world of strong men and iron prejudices and cruel convictions. She could defy the world, but she could not conquer it. She was too ignorant to quarrel with the social arrangements which handicap the weakness of sex with extra weights, and brand its errors as crimes, but a dim sense of injustice struggled within her and still further confused the moral perceptions already confused by error and crime.

She knew she could not expect Heaven's aid, with the crime of unrepented perjury upon her soul; but before the heavy hour when she stood in the sight of God and man and swore away the honour and liberty of an innocent man, she had had gleams of penitence, when she had hoped to make her peace with Heaven, and lead a holy life. After that further plunge into crime, she could hope for no mercy unless she undid her dreadful deed.

But though Alma went to church and prayed for the helpless child, who could not pray for himself, and hoped at least to place his little feet on the heavenward road, she thought daily less of heaven, and was fast sinking into the dreadful practical atheism to which sin leads—the atheism which, because it sins on unavenged, cries, "Tush! God doth not regard," and finally blots the Maker out of the universe altogether.

Alas, poor Alma! she was made for a nobler destiny, and her honest lover, seeing her there, with her mournful gaze and heroic beauty, felt his heart thrill with a vague sense that, in spite of her frailty, she was not unworthy of his passionate adoration. His heart told him what his untutored mind never could, that hers was no common frailty, but the lapse of an exceptionally noble nature led astray, and all his hope was to set her up again on the pedestal whence a villain's arts had hurled her.

So absorbed was she in melancholy musing, that for a long time she did not observe him, and he enjoyed a pensive rapture in the mere sense of her presence and the sight of her tragic beauty, so well set off by the glowing hues of the golden corn, with the poppies blazing through it, by the dark wood, and by the bright appearance of the pretty child in his ribbons and

flowers. He would have liked some enchanter to fix them there for ever, while the child and the brook babbled, the bees hummed, the grasshopper uttered his shrill note of joy, and the bells pealed on from the hidden tower. He watched the changes of her face with compassionate yearning; he saw the pain deepen in it. She was thinking of that morning's experience.

She had been on her way to church as usual, a solitary figure in the straggling crowd of friends and neighbours, when those in front of her pressed back from the lych-gate to let a group of gentlefolk pass, and Alma found herself one of a little line of church-goers, with whom they exchanged greetings. Mrs. Maitland and Lilian came first, then Cyril and Marion, lastly the children. Alma made her curtsey with her usual proud humility, looking her superiors in the face with haughty calm.

Cyril recognized his old friends with the glances which he knew so well how to distribute, missing Alma's face with the ease and naturalness of good breeding; but Marion's eye lighted on the beautiful face of the ruined girl, and Alma never forgot the hot flush of shame and the start of shuddering aversion with which she turned to her husband, pressing close to his side as if for protection, or the exquisite tenderness of the look Cyril gave her, as he returned the pressure on his arm, and quickened his pace to lead Marion away from the sight which so distressed her. The burning blood sprang to Alma's face, her temples throbbed wildly, and in the tumult of mingled passion which convulsed her, the impulse of a tigerish fury surged up, and bade her rush before Marion's face, and hurl her to the ground with one blast of truth shouted out in the ears of the little public standing near.

In five words she could bring Marion's pride for ever to the dust, and blight all the happiness of her life. But the impulse sank amid the roar of other passions, and Alma remained outwardly quiet, passing sedately up the churchyard path among the others, into the cool, hushed church, where the words of benediction and hope sounded in vain for her.

The poignant memory of Marion's look made her eyes flash and her bosom heave in the sunny stillness by the brook-side, and with a deep sigh and a gesture of pain she looked up and met poor Charlie's adoring gaze.

In a moment, the gate on which he leant was cleared, the bit of meadow crossed, the brook leapt, and he stood before her, joyously welcomed by the child, who had too few friends not to appreciate this one, to whom he owed many a toy and cake and still more welcome game of play.

"Alma," Judkins cried, taking off his hat, that the child might

play with its gold band, "dear, dear Alma, it cuts into my heart to see you looking so sorrowful."

"Never mind me, Charlie," she replied, with a wan smile. "I brought it all on myself, and no one can help me. Go away, please; it will do neither of us any good to be seen together."

"One minute, Alma," he protested; "let me speak out once more. I love you so true, Alma, so true; I can't give you up. Let bygones be bygones, and do you try to care for me. It's what your poor father always wished, my dear, and what might have been, if villains—— It's bygones, Alma, bygones, and can't be helped anyway now; but you med have taken me in time, if that hadn't come between us, and you med be happy yet. I'll be a good husband; I'll be a father to that innocent child that is fond of me already. In another place nobody need know he isn't mine, and I'll never bring up the past again you—never. There's a many have begun life similar, and no trouble between them."

"It would be wronging you, Charlie," replied Alma; "you are too good for the like of me. I could never care for you as a wife ought. I loved too true once, and I can never love any more. We are only young once, and we can only love once," she said, expressing Lilian's thought in other words. "No, Charles, I mustn't take advantage of you; you must go and forget me."

"Look here, Alma! that's true about only loving once; and do you think, if I couldn't forget you after what has come between us, I ever could now? No, my dear. I love you true, and ever shall, and all I want is to make you happy, that has been wronged."

Alma burst into tears, and bid him not think too well of her, for that she had grievously sinned.

"And if we are only young once, you are still young," he continued; "you have a deal of life yet to live, and no soul to look to but me. And *he* is as good as dead, and that makes a difference. Take me, Alma, and you'll maybe get fonder of me than you think. Consider the child, too. You'll never get work in Malbourne; and how'll you get it where you are not known?"

Alma was crying bitterly; he had never seen her in so accessible a mood before.

"I mean to go away," she sobbed.

Then Judkins unfolded his cherished project before her. "Come right away with me, my dear; come to America, where we can begin over again fresh, and no soul to cast anything up against us; and you may be happy and honoured—ay, and more thought of than people so humble as us can ever hope to be in the old country. I've a sister there, out West, married

and went out four years ago; and they are rich people now, with more land of their own than Sir Lionel ever had, and all their own doing, There's land to be got almost for the asking, and nothing wanting but a pair of stout hands to make it covered with crops such as never grow in poor old England. Think, my dear, if this corn-field here and half a dozen more was all ours, and we married, with a comfortable house and horses and garden, and our own wood to burn, and cattle and poultry, besides the wild game to feed us, and nothing known agen us, how happy we might be! My sister's husband, he's a great man out there, and a precious poor chap he was here, to be sure. Little Benjy would thrive out in the woods, and grow up to have land of his own, and never know but I was his father. And he should share equal with others as might be sent us, he should. I never do nothing by halves, Alma; and if I said that boy was my son, my son he should be, you may depend upon it. I've spoken to Sir Lionel about it, and he has wrote to several that manage about ships and expenses and all that; and I've a tidy bit of money put by, and my sister, she writes every year, and recommends me to come out West; and there's no tie to keep me here, and you've only to say the word, and we'd have the banns up next Sunday; and I'd give warning to-morrow, for I'm tired of service, though Sir Lionel's is the best, and ready to leave the land where I've seen so much trouble, and we'd be married, and maybe started from Liverpool, this day five weeks. Alma, dear, I can't go and leave you; and you wouldn't blight my prospects and keep me back—ay, and the child—from making my fortune, would you?"

"You are a good man, Charles Judkins," replied Alma, drying her eyes; "you deserve better than to be hampered with such as me. You might find a good girl out there you could marry."

There was a wistful look in Alma's eyes that emboldened Judkins to paint their future in still more glowing terms and urge his suit more ardently than ever; and the end was that, when they strolled slowly back towards Alma's cottage in the ruddying sunshine, a bunch of white stephanotis and maidenhair from the Swaynestone conservatories had strayed from Charlie's coat to Alma's black dress, and Alma's scarlet poppies drooped in glowing languor on the young fellow's honest breast, while the boy's bright head lay sleeping on his arm.

The bells had ceased now, and the swallows were sweeping round the grey belfry, bathed in sunlight, and uttering their peculiar twitter, Wider and wider grew the circles they made,

now in search of prey, now in chase of each other, now in mere delight in airy motion, over the Rectory roof and across the lawn, where a pleasant group was gathered, to one of whom their sunny breasts and curving flight brought sorrowful thoughts of a lonely prisoner, for whom she had translated Grossi's exquisite "Rondinella Pellegrina" long ago.

> "Oh se anch 'io ! ma lo contende
> Questa bassa angusta volta,
> Dove 'l sole non risplende,
> Dove 'l aria ancor m'è tolta,
> Donde a te la mia favella
> Giunge appena, oh, rondinella !"

she was murmuring inwardly, as her glance followed the birds of happy liberty in their graceful gyrations against the lucid sky.

Lilian was making tea at a rustic table beneath the lindens on the lawn; Mrs. Maitland lay on a couch near her! Marion reclined in a low-slung hammock, with one slender foot touching the turf as she swayed to and fro; Cyril lounged in a low garden chair close at hand, very much at his ease, yet ready to hold her cup and plate, and do her bidding; Mr. Maitland, placid and revelling in the thought that he need preach no more for a week, had another garden lounge, and asked for his third cup of tea; Lennie lay on his back, staring at the sky, with one leg crossed over the other, and pointing heavenwards; while Winnie's golden curls were straying over the shoulder of Ingram Swaynestone, who sat near Lilian, and held the child leaning against him encircled by one arm, while he watched the graceful movements of the tea-maker, and delighted in the slim beauty of her hands.

Some stone fruit and a cluster of purple and one of white grapes on the tea-table made a splendid centre of colour beneath the golden green of the sunlit lindens. It was a sweet and happy scene, peaceful, contented, and free, very different from the solitary prison-cell which the swallows suggested to Lilian's imagination. They had been talking as people talk over tea-tables; Cyril had given some droll accounts of things which had amused him in his recent travels. There had been happy laughter and jesting, and now a pleasant silence, which no one wished to break, had fallen on the little party.

Then it was that Winnie had one of her startling visitations of thoughtfulness, and burst out as follows, in her clear, high treble:—"Papa, I wonder how Alma Lee *likes* having to go to hell?"

"My dear little girl, what *are* you talking about?" returned the gentle rector, startled out of his peaceful day-dream.

"Well, you see, she must go there," protested Winnie, with deep earnestness; "it can't be helped now she has broken two commandments—the third and the ninth."

"Hush, dear!" said Lilian; "you must not talk of such things. Besides, let us hope poor Alma repents."

"How can she repent, with poor Henry still in prison?" demanded Winnie, fiercely lifting her head and tossing back her golden mane.

"We must, at least, hope that poor Alma will repent before she comes to die, dear," said Mr. Maitland; "but it is not for any one, least of all one so young as you, to judge her. But you may pray for her."

"Besides," added Mrs. Maitland, "we do not know that Alma has broken those commandments."

"Oh, don't we, though!" cried Lennie, throwing himself round to face his mother; "when she told all those lies about Henry and his grey suit. Why, Henry changed his clothes before lunch, because he got them dirty walking with Lilian."

"If Henry changed his clothes before luncheon, Lennie," said Cyril, quickly, "why did you not say so at the time?"

"Lennie's memory is scarcely to be trusted after so great a lapse of time," said his father. "He probably thought the circumstance possible and desirable, and then came to accept it unconsciously as a fact. Moreover, is it probable that such a circumstance would escape every one's notice but Lennie's?"

"Dear father," interposed Lilian, "can you recall what Henry wore on that fatal day? I never could; there is so little variety in gentlemen's dress. Did Marion remember?"

Marion was crying at the memory of those harrowing events, "I remember perfectly," she replied, "that Henry wore a black coat at luncheon that day. He got some mustard on the cuff, and I helped him to take it off."

"Why did you never say so?" cried Lilian. "Oh, Marion, you and Lennie might have saved him!"

"You are very cruel, Lilian, to say such a thing!" returned Cyril, with an angry flash in his blue eyes. "Henry's dress at luncheon would have proved nothing with regard to his subsequent dress, although it is plain enough to us that he would not have changed again. You should not put such harrowing thoughts into Marion's mind. I thought, too, that this painful theme was not to be discussed."

"Well, Alma will have to go to hell all the same," returned Lennie, with conviction. "I don't care," he added, on being rebuked by Cyril for his sweeping judgment and strong language;

"it's in the Bible about liars having their part in fire and brimstone, and with all your preaching you can't preach it out."

Cyril pressed his hand to his side with the old gesture, and a low moan escaped him. His face was grey with pain, and the drops of anguish stood on his brow. "I cannot bear this," he gasped.

"My poor boy!" sighed Mr. Maitland; "we have been too cruel in re-opening this deadly wound. Come with me. Come, Marion, dry your eyes. I want to show you my bees, real Ligurians; and you must tell me, both of you, what you think of my hives."

They strolled away accordingly, leaving the remainder of the tea-party, and particularly the youthful preacher, Lennie, aghast.

"Mrs. Maitland," asked Ingram Swaynestone, who had by no means enjoyed this unexpected airing of the family skeleton, "when *are* you going to muzzle this brat?"

CHAPTER II.

JUST then a lusty baritone voice was heard in the lane, which was sunk out of sight between the Rectory and Northover grounds, singing joyously—

"Maxwelton braes are bonnie,
Where early fa's the dew,
And 'tis there that Annie Laurie
Gied me her promise true—
Gied me her promise true,
Which ne'er forgot will be;
And for bonnie Annie Laurie
I'll lay me doon and dee."

"Catch him deeing," observed Ingram, sarcastically.

"A precious rum song for a Sunday," added Lennie, whose virtuous frame of mind was rather trying in its intensity.

"I'd lay me doon and dee," sang the unconscious minstrel at the very top of his compass.

"No, you wouldn't," Lennie shouted.

Then they walked across the lawn, peeped over the hedge, and saw Judkins stepping gaily homewards, with Alma's scarlet poppies in his coat. Judkins looked up, startled, and stopped, blushing, in the emission of his highest note.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Swaynestone," he replied, respectfully saluting; "but indeed I would."

"Well, I think you would, Judkins, you foolish fellow," returned Ingram, laughing. "What is the meaning of this festive cheer, may I ask? Why rouse the echoes of Malbourne with the sounds of riot and mirth?"

"Sir," replied Judkins, "I'm engaged to be married. To-morrow I give warning, and in five weeks' time I hope to sail for America."

"Let me recover, Lennie," said Ingram, after having congratulated the fortunate swain, and sent him on his way. "And look here, young one, not a word of this to any one. And please to remember that tragedies are not discussed over teapots, and ladies are not supposed to know anything unpleasant, and, above all, that people never publicly allude to their relations when in gaol."

"Twasn't me; 'twas Win began it," growled Lennie. "Besides, *you* are nobody. You are always here at tea-time. You are going in for Lilian, it's my belief. You do nothing but stare at her like a great gowk."

"You are a promising young party, upon my word," observed Ingram, picking him up by the jacket-collar. "Marvyn should whop you more."

So saying, he carried the struggling boy back to the tea-drinkers and deposited him in the fork of a tree, where he bid him remain, under pain of chastisement, while he and Winnie aimed handkerchiefs and other missiles at him, unmindful for a moment of Alma Lee's affairs.

Lilian was trying to get Mark Antony to accept a saucer of cream, on which the haughty favourite perpetually turned his back, or rather tail, with cool disdain; while Snip and Snap watched it with eager eyes, knowing that Mark's final rejection of the dainty would consign it to them.

"There are moments," said Ingram, who watched the scene with a sort of impatient interest, "when a man might envy a cat."

Lilian assured him that there was plenty of cream in the dairy, if he would like some; and Mr. Maitland and Marion returned—the latter still looking troubled—when it became painfully apparent to Mr. Swaynestone that he had already lingered longer in the family circle than he should have done, and he regretfully took his leave.

Lilian looked after him with a half-pained gaze as he went to the gate, accompanied by her father; then she returned to Marion. "Where is Cyril?" she asked.

"It is his hour for private devotion," she replied, speaking in a voice intended only for Mrs. Maitland and Lilian, the children having set off down the drive to bid their playfellow another

good-bye. "I sometimes wish," she added, with a sigh, "that Cyril were not quite so devout."

"Dear child, that is a bad wish," rebuked Mrs. Maitland.

"He will be upset for at least a day," continued Marion, abstractedly, "and will see none of us. He is still so sensitive; the least reference to my poor brother invariably has this effect. I was the last transgressor," continued Marion, with a sorrowful smile. "It was at Chillon. When we were in that dreadful crypt by Bonnivard's pillar, somebody began to quote Byron's 'Prisoner'—some tiresome tourist. I could not help it, Lilian, but the thought of being shut up all those years; the thought that Henry, who read those very lines so unthinkingly on that fatal day, as you told me, was actually suffering—— Oh, dear!" added Marion, checking a sob. "I turned and asked Cyril to take me away from that dreadful place. Heaven knows what I said. Something about my unfortunate brother, I suppose. Well, Cyril fainted. He told me then that I must never speak of him."

"He will grow less sensitive as his health improves and his happiness becomes more habitual," Mrs. Maitland said, trying to soothe the agitated girl.

"It would be more manly in Cyril, and far better for him, if he would but accept the fact, and make up his mind to meet it bravely," said Lilian. "He cannot go on in this way; his long illness has spoiled him. I must speak to him——"

"Oh, Lilian!" interposed Marion, "pray don't speak to him! He can't bear it, indeed. You will only make matters far worse, indeed—indeed! You think you understand Cyril, but you are mistaken. You are not his wife. I have been his wife only two months, but I know more about him than I ever knew of any human being before."

And the knowledge had taken the careless gaiety from Marion's manner and the youthful ring from her laughter. It was not without reason that she vaunted her fresh matronly dignity, and said, with half-sad playfulness, "I am older than you now, Lilian—years, years older."

"We must bear with dear Cyril," said Mr. Maitland, who had joined them. "Suffering of unusual severity has been laid upon him, his whole life has received a shock, and we must remember that we saved his reason only as by a miracle. Even now his mind is not firmly balanced. Marion must heal that mind as only she can. But Cyril will bear the scars of this furnace all his life, poor lad. We must not marvel that he is changed."

Every one recognized the fierceness of the furnace through

which Cyril had passed, leaving his youth behind, and yet it never struck people that the blow was naturally more severe to Lilian. Even Mr. Maitland, with the memory of Lilian's passionate outburst when she confided the story of Everard's love to him, did not reflect that it makes a greater shipwreck of life to lose a lover than a friend. The tragedy of Cyril's youth threw an additional glamour over him for the remainder of his life; his deep friendship and the sensitiveness which made him grieve to the point of losing his reason and almost his life over a brother's shame invested him with a romantic interest which never faded. It was whispered about in after years, with various modifications and additions, but always to Cyril's credit, long after the trial and the catastrophe to the Everards were forgotten.

The illness with which Cyril had been stricken on hearing Everard's terrible doom left its marks on him for life. No one could say how he was changed, but it was certain that he was never the same man again. During the slow process of recovery, he was for months like a child in intellect, living only for trifles, laughing at a mere nothing, speaking only as a child speaks, reading nothing but the lightest literature, and preferring that specially consecrated to boys' amusement, and, above all, strictly forbidden to approach any painful topic in thought or speech.

The day that saw him out of danger saw Lilian on a bed of sickness, from which she arose almost as weak as Cyril. The twins made their convalescence together, Lilian outstripping her brother in their progress towards health, and their physical weakness — especially Cyril's, which was excessive — made it easy for them to avoid mental exertion. They were told to lead an animal life, and they became boy and girl at holiday once more.

For months neither of them breathed Henry's name, or alluded to the events which had ended so tragically for him. Gradually Cyril's reason, the delicate chords of which had been so cruelly strained, resumed its natural tone, and Lilian, who watched him like a mother, supplied his intellect from day to day with stronger food. First she had occupied his vacant moments with manual employments—wood-carving, painting, and even needlework, which he executed in the early days, while she read to him. Then she advanced him to gardening and the tending of pet animals, and singing with her; thence to an interest in public affairs. As he progressed, and began to talk calmly and seriously, she extended his reading, took him back to old favourite classic authors, and got him to translate these and modern poets into English verse, for which he had a graceful knack; and one day when he brought her a fresh

copy of original verses, she felt that her patient was healed, and determined to send him away from her.

"You have saved his intellect," his physician said, when she showed him the verses, "and I must confess that I had very little hope of such a consummation. No one with a less intimate knowledge of your brother's character could have done what you have done. You have in so doing saved a remarkably fine, if delicate, mental organization."

Then Cyril travelled for some months in Greece, Egypt, and Syria—countries particularly interesting to one of his temperament and education. He revelled in the poetic and historic associations of the ancient homes of letters and arts, and poured out his soul in devotional ecstasy on the hallowed soil of Jerusalem and Nazareth. He also wrote a poem, called "The Knight of Expiation," in blank verse.

The "knight," it appeared, was visited by one of those unlucky excesses of virtue which the vulgar call crimes, and for which public opinion usually exacts the reparation of hanging in these prosaic days. The nature of this virtuous excess was discreetly left to the reader's imagination, *à la Byron*, and was thus as horrible as the most fastidious taste could desire. (Lennie inclined to the opinion that the knight had boiled his grandmother, and played dice with her bones, besides practising the black art.)

The furies of conscience having seized upon this unlucky victim of social prejudices, as M. Hugo et Cie. call criminals, he put on a hair shirt, and went to the Holy Land to do penance at its shrines, and returned to his native shores to be canonized. This plot afforded fine scope for Cyril's descriptive and topographical powers, and admitted of a beautiful account of the knight's feelings on first seeing Jerusalem, which would have been more generally admired if it had not reminded people so strongly of a similar passage in Tasso. The character of the knight had unfortunately been anticipated by Byron in Childe Harold. Nevertheless, the pretty volume, called "The Knight's Expiation, and other Poems," was greatly admired, if not purchased.

Marion had seen Cyril frequently during his convalescence, and had only parted with him at the beginning of his tour; and in the second June after his illness, her father took her to Paris, where Cyril met her, and was quietly married to her. The young couple passed a brief paradise in Switzerland, and then went home to Malbourne, whence, after a few days' sojourn, they were to go to Cyril's fresh curacy in the west of London. The twins had, however, been parted since the time when Lilian finished her

pious task of rescuing her brother's intellect from the shipwreck which threatened it.

They had met again but four and twenty hours since, yet Lilian knew their old close relationship was at an end for ever. An insurmountable barrier had risen up between them. This, she told herself, was but in the natural course of things; the peculiar bond of twinship, strengthened as it had accidentally been by the circumstances of Cyril's terrible illness, could not be expected to outlive early youth. Her brother had now found other ties; he was tasting the fulness of life. The old childish associations must fade in the full stress of manhood, and they must now be only as brothers and sisters commonly are. It was only natural, and yet it grieved Lilian with an unspeakable grief. In the sore trouble which had fallen on her, she needed her brother's close friendship as she never had done before.

As Marion had predicted, they saw nothing more of Cyril that night; but the next day he appeared among them with a cloudless brow, and set them all laughing with his droll anecdotes and observations, the drollery of which was so greatly enhanced by his grave face and almost pathetic voice. He never laughed, and only rarely smiled, and although his very smile was sad, it was as sweet as only rare smiles are. One of those smiles was sufficient to win a friend for life, as he well knew. There had been a time when he was wont to laugh as happily and heartily as only young manhood can.

There was a great croquet-tournament that afternoon at Mr. Marvyn's, and there the Maitlands, the younger Garretts and Swaynestones assembled, to measure their powers one against the other with all the serious ardour which the pursuit of croquet in the palmy days of its youth exacted.

Will no bard rise to pour forth lyric song in honour of that noble but now extinct pastime? Can no historian be found to chronicle the decline and fall of croquet? It descended, like other gifts of Heaven, unexpectedly from some far celestial eminence, and took captive the hearts of the sons, and still more of the daughters, of men, at one stroke. In those who were young at that golden period, the peculiar sharp yet dull click of the balls still awakes a thrilling combination of delicious and romantic feelings, as it is evoked by the hand of some careless child, who has routed out the dusty mallets and balls from some forgotten corner, and imagines himself a new Columbus in consequence.

Mr. Marvyn, who, it will be remembered, was curate of Malbourne and tutor to the young Maitlands in succession, had been very severely bitten by the croquet mania. He had ruthlessly

levelled his wife's flower-beds to make a fitting ground for the noble pastime, and this he mowed and rolled and watered himself, and upon it he permitted no unlicensed foot to stray.

When the players arrived, they found every hoop and stick exactly placed, after careful and accurate measurement, on a lawn newly shaven and tested by a spirit level, and a host and hostess too much burdened with the responsibility of reading the new club rules to go through the conventional forms of welcome.

An interlude of tea was grudgingly acquiesced in; and Mr. Marvyn, laying aside his own favourite mallet with a deep sigh, and carefully noting the position of each player in his pocket-book, followed his guests to some tables in the shade of two fine elms, and, taking a chair by Mrs. Cyril Maitland, began to scold her seriously for the blunders she had made, and laughed at, which was worse, while playing on his side. But there were some people, and among them Ingram Swaynestone, who took his tea on the grass at Lilian's feet, who thought the tea interlude by no means the least agreeable part of the tournament, and responded with little alacrity to Mr Marvyn's summons to continue the combat.

Night fell all too soon upon the eager contest, and the light of the mellow August moon was supplemented by that of two carriage-lamps, which were carried from hoop to hoop, to the great distraction of nervous people; while the less-ardent players, resigning their balls to others, joined the non-combatants in the drawing-room, and yielded themselves to the frivolity of conversation and music.

"Poets are made of precious queer stuff," Ingram Swaynestone observed to Lilian, as they stood on the lawn, waiting their turn to play, and listened to a song which Miss Swaynestone was singing. "Now, what could have put that notion into Cyril's head? I'm sure he never left off loving anybody."

The song which Cyril had written, and which had been daintily set by an Austrian student he met in his travels, was as follows: —

"When I began to love you,
'Twas like the beginning of June,
Like the dewy birth of the morning
Or the swell of the first lark's tune.

"All grew so bright, so gracious,
So full of mystery sweet,
Such a deep and dear enchantment
Had bound me, hands and feet.

"But when I finished to love you,
'Twas like the closing of night,
When November's gloaming is sheeted
In rain-clouds falling light.

"Ah! when I finished to love you,
I finished with all things bright,
And I saw a dark grave yawning
To hide my heart in its night."

Lilian knew that Cyril had written it at the time of his estrangement from Marion, who was listening to it now with great enjoyment, unconscious that she was the heroine of it; but she only said that poets were supposed to feel all the emotions of which the human breast is capable, and Ingram was about to make some rejoinder, when the reiterated cry of "Blue to play!" at last aroused his attention, and he reluctantly obeyed the summons.

But when the game was at last ended, and they found themselves going home in the moonlight across the few fields, and through the dewy lane which lay between the curate's dwelling and the rector's, Ingram contrived that Lilian should linger behind with him, so that there was no chance of interruption. The words of Cyril's song echoed in his ears—

"Such a deep and dear enchantment
Had bound me, hands and feet."

"I cannot break the spell, Lilian," he said, "and I do not think it well to try any more. My father sees it at last, and, though at one time he wished me to look for rank and fortune, he now thinks I cannot do better than follow my heart."

"Dear Ingram," replied Lilian, pausing at a gate, over which they saw the village sleeping in the moonlight, "I would have spared you this. I thought I had been explicit enough."

"You were explicit enough; I quite understood that I was refused. But, dearest Lilian, you cannot imagine how earnestly and truly I love you," he continued, his face flushing beneath its brown with deep and serious feeling. "I know well how unworthy I am of you. I have not been a good man; I was not like Cyril. I did as others do. But, dearest Lilian, ever since the happy day, long ago now, when I found that I loved you, 'when I began to love you,' as Cyril's song says, it was indeed like the beginning of June—everything was new. I woke up to loathe all those things in my life that were unworthy of you; I set to work to sweep them all away, and do better. I am not good for much even now, I know well; but if there is any good in me at all, if I am not a mere unscrupulous man of pleasure, if I have any higher aspirations, if I try to do my duty in my small way, it is all owing to you."

"No, Ingram," returned Lilian, looking into the honest, manly face, which was alight with unwonted fervour; "you are wrong,

believe me. It is not due to me, but to your own good and true nature, which only needed the touch of love—which you must give one day, not to me, but to some better, more suitable woman —to show you the real meaning of life. Believe me, Ingram, men are not so dependent on women. Do not give in to the conventional fiction of making your better self depend on anything so uncertain as the will and liking of one weaker than yourself. The moral nature of men is stronger than that of women. We all want something to lean upon. Do not make pillars of us. Do you think any woman could love one she believed her inferior?"

"I hope and trust so," said Ingram, with a little smile. "Without that there would be little chance of happiness for me and many another poor fellow. Dear Lilian, try to love me. How can I live without you?"

"I thought we were to be friends," replied Lilian, with a sigh and a regretful intonation of her beautiful voice.

It was like the most exquisite music to Ingram's ear; it seemed to take his soul captive and surround him with the purest delight. Merely to hear her discoursing on everyday themes to others, filled him with a sense of delicious perfection which no cares could distract.

"We must be something more than friends," he said, "when the very sound of your voice stirs every fibre within me."

"We can never be more than friends; it is not in my power," she replied quickly and with agitation.

Ingram looked at her pale, pure face with a startled glance, and saw that tears were fast gathering in her eyes. Was there some hidden trouble in her serene and lovely life? He could not think it. She had outlived the pain and annoyance of her old playmate's ruin; she had received her brother back from the very jaws of death; all was fair and pleasant around her. Her step was light as only that of health and young happiness can be; her laughter had the most joyous ring of any he ever heard; she was always bright and full of pleasant thoughts and airy suggestions. No; it was not possible that sorrow could have a home in her heart. He looked silently and searchingly at the figure by his side.

She was of more ethereal mould than she had been in earlier days; and her features, losing the soft, joyous curves of youth, had fined into that perfect purity of outline which in her brother seemed austerity, but in her suggested spirit-like sweetness. The twins' faces had been cast in the very same mould, only the lips were fuller and firmer in the sister, and she lacked the squareness

visible in her brother's jaw. For the first time, Ingram asked himself the question people never asked when under the spell of Lilian's glances—Had she beauty? And his answer was in the affirmative.

"Dear Lilian," he said, "it is in your power to try to love me."

Lilian shook her head. "Do you remember the day of Ben Lee's death?" she asked. "Henry Everard and I were in Temple Copse at midday when Long's waggon was passing. It was then"—Lilian faltered, and her lip trembled a little—"that we became engaged."

Ingram was not wholly unprepared for this, and said so, gazing quietly before him, without returning the gaze he knew she had fixed on him. "But that is long ago," he added, "and you have your life to live. Because you made one mistake, because one man proved unworthy, will you spoil another's happiness?"

"Unworthy!" cried Lilian, in a voice that startled him. "Henry Everard was never unworthy; that is no word to apply to him. A more spotless man never breathed."

"Oh, Lilian," returned Ingram, "you must indeed have loved him if you believed him innocent after the evidence which condemned him."

"I did indeed love him," said Lilian, with quiet fervour.

He was silent for a time, half stunned by the calm force of Lilian's words; then at last he spoke.

"This old pain must be healed," he said falteringly; "the dead past must bury its dead."

"The past is alive and young," replied Lilian.

"Dearest Lilian, this must not be," said Ingram, with resolution. "It is wrong and morbid to go on brooding over an old sorrow, and refusing comfort. Innocent or not, he is dead to you; your love can profit him no more than if he were actually in the grave——"

"You are mistaken," interrupted Lilian; "we correspond. Besides, the imprisonment is not for life."

"Lilian, this is too dreadful. A convicted felon with a twenty years' sentence! Supposing even the best, and he came out at the end of fifteen or sixteen years; you are six and twenty now; youth would be gone——"

"But not love, Ingram. Do you know what love is? It is stronger than time, stronger than prisons, stronger than sorrow, stronger than shame; it is stronger, even, than death. Many waters cannot quench it, even waters of salt tears; and no floods of affliction can drown it. Love is immortal, and knows nothing of age or death."

Ingram gazed awe-stricken upon the inspired face, etherealized by the dreamy moonlight and its own holy passion, and listened to the beautiful voice as people listen to fine strains of organ-music.

"Lilian," he said at last, "this cannot be. You must not throw away your life like this. Time will soften these feelings."

"Never," she returned firmly. "Ingram, you must waste no more time on me. You are my very dear friend, and I have told you the secret of my heart, and you see now how impossible any such relations are to me. Let your past bury its dead, and fix your heart's good affections elsewhere. Come, let us go."

But he would not go on; he stopped, and, taking her hand, poured out a torrent of remonstrance and entreaty.

"Look, Ingram," she said at last, "look northwards. If our sight could reach so far, we should see a river, a dark river crowded with shipping, and beyond the river stands a black round mass of buildings. In that dark mass there is a cell, in which, perhaps, this very moon is shining now through the barred window. In that cell is a man, a gentleman, a man of unusual gifts and culture. He is young, and everything has been taken from him—liberty, fortune, hope, ambition, honour, friends; but not love," she added, her features transfigured as she spoke; "love and innocence are still his. Ingram, I am all that man has on this earth, and I love him. Do you think any happiness life can offer would make me desert him?"

"He would never wish you to be bound to him if he really cared for you."

"He does not wish it. But think of that solitary prisoner, and remember he is the only man I ever loved or could love. That is my last word."

They went silently on their way with full hearts, Lilian's tearful glances always turned northwards, and those of her companion bent downwards.

At that moment, within the gloomy building beyond the dark and crowded river, a strongly built man, with a haggard face and dark eyes full of intellect, was lying on a hard couch in his solitary cell, on the bare white wall of which fell a square patch of bright moonlight, crossed by the shadow of iron bars. He was glad that the window looked southwards, and turned to it even in his sleep.

But he was awake now, and thinking how the mellow glory was falling on the Malbourne corn-fields and the beloved roof which sheltered Lilian, and wondering if, perhaps, the same lustre which gilded his dim and dreary cell made a halo for the adored face.

CHAPTER III.

Some few years since, the fiat went forth for the old familiar walls and heavy gates of Portsmouth town to be levelled to the ground, that the space which these now useless relics of the past occupied might be covered with buildings connected with the defences and adapted to the requirements of the present. Down went many a fine old elm beneath axe and rope, and bit by bit the ramparts disappeared, and the ditches were filled by the busy hands of sunburnt men, armed with barrow, pick-axe, and spade.

One summer morning, while these works were in progress, the sun shone brightly in the clear blue sky, and over the quiet sea and still quieter harbour; on the troop-ships and mail-clad men-of-war, the busy steamers and countless boats of every description which fill these peaceful waters; on the gay garrison town, and on the beach, crowded with bathers. Now and again a bugle rang out, a gun was fired, snatches of military music were heard; on the breezy common, the strong horses and heavy guns of mounted artillery were careering through thick dust-clouds, whence the sparkle of arms and accoutrements gleamed more effectively in the brilliant sunlight. Portsmouth streets were full of life, and the melodious chimes of the parish church floated sweetly over street, harbour, and bastion at every quarter.

Not very far from the Queen's Bastion a party of men were at work upon the partly levelled fortifications. They toiled on in the hot sunshine in a listless, unwilling manner, each man apparently trying to accomplish as little as possible. They were an ugly set, for the most part, with low brows, heavy jaws, and brutal looks, and their close-cropped hair, small black oilskin caps, dingy yellow clothes, and clumsy boots by no means softened their repulsive appearance. Many of them looked at the gay carriages and brightly clad women and children passing and repassing, while some bent their scowling brows stolidly over their spades. But the gazers did not look up with a direct glance; they looked out of the corners of their eyes, round their noses, with all kinds of crooked and tortuous glances, like the traitors Dante saw in his Inferno. Few of these men could give a level glance or a candid answer; still fewer could think a clear and honest thought.

At intervals, watching them, and occasionally giving a sharp, stern order, stood armed men, stalwart and blue-clad, with faces like rocks. Their guns were loaded with ball, and their side-arms, gleaming in the sun, looked terribly practical. As the convicts

pursued their forced, unwelcome toil, with the sweat beading their weather-stained brows, slow, melancholy, long-drawn music pealed from the distance, and grew more and more distinct, while the passengers thickened, and a slowly moving mass of scarlet, interspersed with flashes of steel and gold, came into sight. The wail of the trumpets rose into notes of shriller anguish, while the heavy roll of the muffled drums beneath was like the despairing voice of some irrevocable doom, and smote heavily upon the heart of one of the convicts, who recognized in the wailing music, the reversed arms, and slow rhythm of the soldiers' even march, the solemn pageant of a military funeral.

As the procession drew nearer, the road became more choked with passengers and gazers, and people climbed on the unfenced works, some to see the pageant better, others to be out of the way till the crowd was past. They gradually pressed closer and closer on the convicts, whose dangerous proximity they did not heed, until the warders, finding it impossible to keep them away, formed the convicts in line as far away as possible, and bid them stand at attention while the funeral glided by in its slow majesty.

The convict in whose breast the sorrowful music had found such a responsive echo was on the outside of the two-deep line nearest the road, and was within a few paces of two ladies who had drawn aside to avoid the crowd. At first sight there was nothing to distinguish No. 62 from his repulsive comrades, but a closer gaze revealed an intellectual face, gaunt and lined with suffering; dark hazel eyes, with a straight, thoughtful glance; and a genial mouth, which had lost its old habit of smiling. He was of slighter build than most of the convicts, but strong and well-set. His name, which he had not heard for a weary time, and which his nearest and dearest friends had long ceased to pronounce, was Henry Everard.

Many an old memory stirred within him, as he heard the muffled roll of the drums and looked upon the scarlet mass of silent men moving by; for many of the soldiers wore the number of his brother's regiment on their uniforms, and he thought of the sunny-hearted Leslie, whom he had so admired and loved, and with whom, when quite a lad, he had spent so many pleasant holidays, all tuned to the bright music of trumpet and drum, and the quick rattle of arms and rhythmic tread of armed men.

He remembered his pride the first time he was admitted as a grown man to the mess-table, and his brother's gallant presence and light-hearted merriment, and the respect paid him by the raw lads who had just joined. Of all his brothers, Leslie was nearest him in age, though some years his senior, and dearest to him in

affection; but now—where was he? Lost to him with all that the great storm of his life had carried away—lost, but not forgotten. His eye sought him among the officers, one or two of whom he recognized, but Leslie was not there. He might have exchanged; he was probably promoted. Who knew what might have happened in those years?

"Yes," one of the ladies said, "my husband knew him well. They were stationed at Malta together. As you see, our regiment is following as well as his own. A popular officer, as nice men generally are."

Everard had observed the second regiment, and at the same moment it had struck him that, although the charger walking with empty saddle behind the gun-carriage showed the rank of the deceased officer to be at least that of major, it was not impossible that his brother might be lying beneath the Union Jack. Then he caught sight of the occupants of the mourning-coaches. In one he saw the grey head of his father, and his heart misgave him. But he reflected that he was Admiral of the Port. Might he be there in his official capacity? But George was there also, and his heart died within him.

"His coming home was so sad," continued one of the ladies. "If he could but have lived till he reached land! But he died just as they were disembarking. His wound was not so very serious; he got fever upon it."

"And his friends were just too late to see him alive," added the other lady. "Only one child, I think? And the poor wife was here to receive him."

This, though in low tones such as ladies naturally use in a crowd, the convict's eager, strained ears caught, till at last he could bear it no longer; and, forgetful of the strict prison discipline, he lifted his cap, and, stepping quickly forward, addressed the lady nearest him.

"Pardon me, madam, the officer's name?" he asked.

"Major Everard," replied the lady, startled into a quick response, and drawing back with some alarm.

No. 62 had neither eyes nor ears for the warder's stern admonition. He drew back into line, while the heart-shaking roll of the drums and the wail of the trumpets grew fainter and fainter, and the crowd moved away. Then he resumed his barrow at the word of command, and wheeled it along the plank under the hot sun; but heavy tears fell upon the dry rubbish of the old fortifications, and ever and anon he lifted his toil-stained hand to dash away the quick-falling drops, while his comrades' rude jeers and foul pleasantries, stealthily muttered as they were, reached his ears unheeded.

"Emily," said the lady who had replied to the convict's question, as they resumed their road when the crowd melted, "that man was a gentleman. Did you notice his voice and the way in which he lifted his cap?"

"Poor fellow!" returned the other. "Why was he so curious? He will be punished for speaking, you know. Perhaps he had friends in the regiment."

"Perhaps. By the way, I wonder how soon one ought to call on Mrs. Everard? She never really joined the regiment, you see; but our husbands were intimate friends."

Leslie dead! the gay and gallant Leslie, the joyous, light-hearted companion of his boyhood, his father's favourite son! Like the slow strokes of a knell which beat into the agonized brain of a mourner, these mournful words—Leslie dead—kept dinning into Everard's ears all that long day. He heard them in every stroke of pick and hammer, while he toiled on with his barrow; in the boom of guns at sea: in the measured tread of the convicts as they marched back to dinner; in the few brief orders given by the warders, as the convicts stood with arms uplifted, while a rapid, skilled hand was passed over every inch of their bodies in search of anything that might have been received and secreted from the outer world; in the clang of the prison bell, which told that the hour of respite was past, and time come to march out to work again.

"And he will never know that I was innocent," thought Everard, as he ate his solitary meal in his cell, "Sein Brod mit Thränen ass."

Next to the discovery of Cyril's treachery, he had been most cut to the heart by receiving no message or communication from Leslie after his conviction. The admiral's stern though kindly nature he knew, and he was not surprised that, after the long array of damning evidence against him, the plain, upright sailor should treat him as one dead; nor was he surprised, though deeply pained, that Keppel should do likewise.

His sisters and their husbands he knew too well to think they would ever trouble themselves about a disgraced kinsman; but Leslie, the generous, warm-hearted Leslie, whom he so loved and admired, and Marion, the darling of his childhood and youth—that they should think him guilty, that cut into the very core of his heart. And now Leslie—unless, indeed, the dead see the things of life with clearer vision than they who are still mingled in its turmoil—could never know that he was innocent. And he had taken a wife—left forlorn now, poor soul!—and there was an orphan child of his own blood. And so the great stream of

life rolled on past the desolate rock to which he was left chained, deaf to the thunder of the on-rushing waves, clean forgotten, like a dead man out of mind.

Like those sufferers whom Dante met in hell, and who thought no more of their agonies in the bitter tidings he brought them of their beloved on earth, No. 62 cared little for the punishment and loss of good marks which his breach of discipline cost him. It was many days before he was again employed on the fortifications, for that work was eagerly coveted and only given to the best-behaved men, both because it afforded the unfortunate captives a welcome glimpse of the outside world, and also because it afforded greater facilities of escape than any other work, greater even than those which the dockyard labourers enjoyed.

Everard's next week, therefore, was spent within the dreary confines of the prison, partly at accounts and partly at hospital duty, in which he was much more useful than other men on account of his previous training, but duties which he particularly abhorred for many reasons; amongst others, on account of the confinement and the leisure they gave the mind for brooding.

It is difficult to realize the agony of despair which devoured Everard's heart and confused his intellect in the first months of his imprisonment. The horror of Cyril's treachery and evil-doing, and the shame of seeing all human virtue and honour in the dust, blunted his perceptions of minor evils at first, and the black despair of feeling that there was no God, or only some cruel deity who laughed at the misery of innocent men and promoted evil-doers, made him like a stone.

The thought that his life's purpose was wrecked; that he could now never pursue those grand scientific theories which he was so near bringing to perfection; that the productions of centuries of human intellect were closed to him for ever; that the mental powers he so delighted in exercising must rust, and perhaps be crushed beneath a daily load of brute-like drudgery and degrading hardship; that his finer susceptibilities would be blunted or effaced by the daily contact with all that was coarsest and foulest in human nature; that he would be utterly cut off from all that was calculated to nourish and refresh the higher nature, did not come to him till much later.

Like some captured wild beast, he submitted with dogged unwillingness to the restraints of superior force; he did his prison tasks with the mute protest of the blinded Samson among his tormentors, not caring whether he pulled down the pillars of his prison-house or not in his savage strength. It was a relief to him to exhaust himself in hard bodily toil, and he performed feats of

strength in his passion which surprised men born and trained to physical labour.

The chaplain was a man for whom the human soul had no secret sanctuary in which angels, much less foolish and sinful men, might fear to tread, and for whom the highest mysteries of the divine nature were but scraps of glib commonplace; a man who expected men steeped in years of vice and foulness to be converted at once by the rude and sudden enunciation of his well-worn formula; a sincere and well-meaning man withal, who looked upon earth as an antechamber to an unspeakable hell, from which a very small and numbered few might occasionally be snatched by a sort of chance-medley jugglery, of which he and half a dozen more alone knew the catchword or enchanted password; the chaplain pronounced him an utter reprobate.

"But have you no care for your poor soul?" he asked one day, after wearisome exhortations and endless questioning, to which the prisoner had given no reply. "None whatever," he replied at last.

He was no favourite with the warders, whom he despised in his unjust resentment of their authority, or with his fellow-prisoners, who hated him, firstly, because he was a gentleman; and, secondly, because all his looks and words silently rebuked the viciousness of their own. Excessive labour and hopeless brooding brought him to the hospital at last.

The prison doctor knew his history, and felt for him as for a brother in trouble, and, accustomed as he was to suspect and discover malingering, saw at once that No. 62's strange malady was no feigned one, but arose from the mind rather than the body. One day, after many rough but kindly efforts to rouse him, he said at last—

"If you go on like this, you will lose your reason before long."

"Reason!" retorted the patient, with bitter scorn. "And what use is reason to me?"

"It is of little use to you, perhaps," rejoined the officer, moving away, "but the loss of it will make you a dangerous nuisance to others."

This drastic observation had a wholesome effect upon the prisoner's stricken mind. The notion of sinking into a dangerous nuisance stung him into a sense of the unmanliness of giving himself up to his miseries; it awoke in him the bracing thought that some faint remnants of duty remained even to one so cut off from his kind as himself.

He thought that he probably would become insane, his medical knowledge told him how much he had to fear on that score from

his terrible life; but he was resolved that at least he would do his best to preserve his wits. He therefore took counsel with the surgeon, and during his hospital leisure formed a scheme of intellectual and moral discipline. He forced himself to an interest in the repulsive human creatures and the dreary occupations of the prison. He made a mental time-table, in which certain days or hours were to be given to the recollection of particular fields of knowledge, certain days to the mental speaking of Latin, Greek, etc. Such poetry as he knew by heart he arranged for periodic mental repetition. He did the same with the plots of Æschylus and others which he loved, and could not obtain from the prison library. He told himself the story of Troy and the wanderings of Ulysses on many a lonely night. He traced the minutest recesses of his fellow-prisoners' anatomy beneath their outward semblance, mentally depriving them of flesh, muscle, and sinew, as easily as Carlyle's imagination dispossessed his fellows of their garments; and lost no opportunity of observing whatever crossed his limited field of vision.

It was weary work, but it saved him. He fed his starving heart with memories of hours passed with Lilian and others dear to him—memories as full of pain as pleasure, particularly those which recalled the few last vivid days at Malbourne before his arrest. Yet his heart was still bitter with black despair.

Chapel-going was a dreary thing, and little calculated to edify one less full of despairing doubt than Everard. It was difficult to preserve a devotional spirit amid that crowd of foul-mouthed malefactors, who mingled ribaldry and blasphemy with the responses they uttered and the hymns they sang for the sake of using their voices.

One day, Everard was aroused from a mental review of the symptoms in a complicated and interesting case he once conquered, during the sleepy drone of the Litany, by a rush through the air near him, followed by a crash. He looked up in time to see the bent head of the governor struck by the shoe of the prisoner next him, and the governor himself looked up in time to receive the second shoe full in his face. This incident, typical of many similar ones, seriously interfered with the morning's devotion.

One drowsy, warm autumn morning, about six months after his conviction, Everard was more than usually depressed, and had taken refuge in sorrowful dreams of happier days. The prisoners were quieter than usual, some dozing, some refreshed by the *Te Deum* they had been loudly singing, some really touched by the awful pathos of the gospel which was being read, when suddenly a phrase seemed to detach itself from the rest of the

narrative, and, as if uttered by a trumpet voice, to trace itself deeply upon Everard's mind, waking him from his melancholy dream, and startling him into a newer life. The phrase consisted of those heart-shaking words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Every detail of the agony and crucifixion flashed clear upon his mind, strangely mingled with the feeling of calm strength with which the picture of Gethsemane in the study at Malbourne had inspired him in the hour of his extremity. Tears rushed to his eyes, and he trembled. All those weary months his heart had been echoing that most bitter cry, without remembering that Christ had been forced to utter it in the hour in which He accomplished man's redemption.

The darkness which had come upon him in the prisoner's dock at the discovery of his friend's baseness rolled away, and he recognized his own wrong-doing. What was Cyril, after all, that his faith in divine and human goodness should depend on him? Had he not idolized the poor, weak, erring lad, whom his strength should rather have pitied? And what was he that he should escape that darkness which brooded over the very cross? How many men down the long roll of the ages had suffered bonds and treachery, being innocent? Cyril's cynical "She is not the first," flashed upon him, and he wondered that he should have cried out so loud when he found himself enrolled in the vast army of the world's sufferers. What claim had he for exemption from earth's anguish?

"There is a God, and there is good, and the bitterest lot has comfort," he said within himself, reversing his despairing utterance in the dock when the conviction of Cyril's treachery flashed upon him, as he marched with his fellow-sufferers into the yard, where an hour of sunlight and freedom within four walls was permitted them on Sundays.

The mid-day sky was transparently blue and suffused with light, so that it was a joy to look upon; the sunny autumn air was sweet to breathe; and the sheets of sunshine fell pleasantly upon him, in spite of the garb of shame and bondage they lighted, and the prison walls whose shadows limited them, and for the first moment since his imprisonment Everard felt that enjoyment was possible, even to one so stricken as himself, since Heaven smiled still upon him, captive though he was.

Just then an oblong packet was put in his hand. He looked at it with mute amazement for a moment, for he had forgotten how it feels to receive a letter; and then he uttered a faint cry, for the handwriting was Lilian's. His first instinct was to conceal

it from the vulgar crew around him, and he scarcely noticed that the sacred cover, closed by the beloved hand, had been violated by some stranger's touch, according to the stern prison rule.

He walked up and down the yard as one whose steps are on air, his eyes full of soft fire, happy merely to hold the treasure in his hand. He did not open it till he was alone in his cell, that narrow witness of so much agony, which now became a palace of delight.

It was a letter such as only the tenderness of a good and loving woman for one in deep affliction could inspire. It had touched even the official reader, accustomed to moving letters full of ill-spelled pathos from broken-hearted and often injured women to the villains they loved, and it went into the very marrow of Everard's being, and steeped him in an atmosphere of pure thought and high-souled feeling, to which he had long been a stranger, and which refreshed his parched spirit like waters in a desert of burning sand.

Lilian briefly mentioned Cyril's terrible illness and her own, and described his state, which was still one of doubtful sanity, requiring the most watchful care; there were few tidings besides. Then she spoke of Henry's affliction, and bid him keep up his heart, and pray constantly, as she did, that his innocence might be made clear. That the truth must come out sooner or later, she was convinced, referring him to the great promises made to the just man in the Scriptures. In the mean time, who could tell but that some wise and beneficent end was to be fulfilled by his sojourn in the prison. The purposes of the Almighty were deep and unsearchable, far hidden from the thoughts of men; but whatever treachery and wickedness had brought Everard to that pass of shame and misery, she bid him remember that without the divine permission he could not be there.

What if some nobler and higher use than he could ever have wrought outside in the free world were to be his in that dreary place? Who could say what the influence of one solitary man of stainless life might be in that crowd of degraded yet still human creatures, or what sorrow might be there to comfort? Let him only remember that the Almighty had placed him in that dreary dungeon as surely as He had placed the sovereign on the throne, the priest at the altar, and the bright blossom in the sunshine, and take comfort.

These opportune words soothed and strengthened Everard's soul, the more so as Lilian did not underrate the magnitude of the sacrifice he had been called upon to make, but spoke feelingly of the cruel denials and degradations of his lot, and of the frustration

of their common hopes, and of the separation, which she trusted might soon be at an end.

She bid him remember also that, as a true lover, he must keep up his courage for her sake, and hope in the future, which they might still enjoy together. Nor was this noble letter wanting in those assurances of love which are so cordial to parted lovers. Its effect upon the lonely prisoner is difficult to imagine, much less describe.

But it was greatly due to the hope and faith which it inspired, that from that day the prison became to Everard no longer a place of darkness and despair, but a part of God's own world, over which divine wisdom and mercy still smiled, and in which a man's soul might still find its necessary celestial food.

CHAPTER IV.

Everard found, to his unspeakable consolation, that he might answer Lilian's letter, though his answer would have to pass before the cold eyes of the officials; and, further, that once in every few months Lilian intended to write to him.

Thus from time to time his soul was braced and refreshed by the dear delight of communicating with the being he loved most in the world. How he counted the weeks and days till the day of days arrived; how he treasured phrases and sentences of those precious letters (which he was, of course, not allowed to preserve) in his memory; and how much thought he gave beforehand to the composition of replies!

Many dark and terrible hours of bitter inward wrestling he still had after that blessed autumn Sunday, but the general tenour of his inward life was brave and hopeful. He found much to interest him in his fellow-prisoners, and here and there flowers of tenderness and charity sprung up along the barren prison path, and he even formed friendships—yes, warm and lasting friendships—with some of the felons amongst whom his lot was cast, and enjoyed the pure happiness of knowing that he had, as Lilian predicted, rescued more than one fallen creature from despair, and set his face heavenwards.

Among his first friends was a young fellow whose character reminded him strongly of Cyril's, lovable, pious, well-disposed, refined, but weak and selfish. He was of gentle birth, and had

held a position of trust under a large banking firm. He married young on a small income; marriage brought cares, and did not diminish the love of pleasure. He got into debt, gambled to extricate himself, and, of course, plunged further in. Ruin stared him in the face, and he embezzled the sums trusted him, meaning, as such criminals usually do, to pay all back in time. He left a young wife and child destitute in the hard world while undergoing his seven years' imprisonment. He was heart-broken, and Everard saw him glide swiftly into the clutches of consumption and fade before him.

Many a stroke of work he did for the poor weakling, and many a thought of hope and manly cheerfulness he gave him. And by the darkness in the prison the day the poor fellow was taken to the infirmary—never more, as Everard well knew, to come out again—he knew how much brightness his friendship had made in that dreary spot. Everard, as a special grace, besought them to give him hospital duty, that he might himself tend his dying friend, and thus he was able to soothe his latest moments; receive his piteous message for his wife, whom Everard had little hope of ever meeting; and close his eyes when he had no more need of the sun.

As the outer world, so was the narrow prison sphere, Everard found after a while: men trusted and betrayed, loved and hated, schemed and envied, derided misfortune or helped it, as in the world, only there was a larger percentage of rascals inside the prison than outside. His friends were chiefly gentlemen, though he sought the friendship of the lowest; a man had but to be miserable to found a claim upon his heart.

But never till he dwelt on equal terms with the scum of all classes did he discover how hard and inflexible are the iron bars which divide class from class. The gentlemen, from the fraudulent director and forging ex-Guardsman down to the smallest clerk or shopman who could handle a pen, hailed him as a brother, while those who belonged to what one may call the washing classes were as his twin brothers; but the hand-labourers, the non-readers and non-washers, and the criminal class proper, looked upon him as their natural enemy, and, beyond mere brutal elementary necessities, discovered little on which they could exchange sympathy and build friendship.

Everard sometimes longed for half a dozen villainous noblemen, a misdoing minister or two, and one or two iniquitous emperors, to make the social world complete. In that case, in spite of the prison equality, there would be no fear, he well knew, that the little society would resolve itself into a republic; the rascal emperor

would have his rascal court, and the minor rascals would fall naturally into their places.

In the process of the long years a sort of sleep had settled upon Everard's nature. He grew so inured to the prison routine, with its numbing drudgery, that he had ceased to think of freedom or feel active pain in his never-ceasing torment. But Leslie's funeral was like the stab of a sharp knife in a numbed limb; it woke him to full consciousness of his misery and degradation. He had been at Portsmouth only for some six months, having been suddenly transported thither, he knew not why, and he had but recently discovered that his father was port-admiral.

Daily, as he worked on the dockyard extension, he had passed the admiral's great house, with the green in front, and the semaphore, waving long arms to all the subject ships in harbour, upon its roof, and had looked at it with a listless, incurious eye, little dreaming who was the chief figure in the little court which gathers round the port-admiral as a tiny social king, till one sunny noon, when going home to dinner with his gang, he saw the admiral descending the steps to welcome some guests, and felt the sting of his humiliation as he had never done before, not even when one day, in the midst of his muddy work at the extension, he had seen Keppel in full uniform rowed ashore from his ship with all the pomp and circumstance of a naval captain on blue waters. Some weeks before the funeral, when he was going to the dockyard works at early morning, the port-admiral's house was still lighted up, its windows shone sickly in the grey daylight, a few carriages were still drawn up in a lessening line before the principal door, and the last strains of a military band were dying away.

The admiral, assisted by his daughter-in-law, the Hon. Mrs. Keppel Everard, had given a great ball that night, and in one of the carriages, into which the admiral was leaning, talking, No. 62 saw a black-coated man, whose features, dim in the shadow, suggested Cyril's, and by his side, pale from the long night's waking, and talking to the old man, was surely, surely, his own sister Marion.

Did they know he was there? or had Lilian purposely withheld the information to spare them pain? He could not tell. But these circumstances, together with the funeral, conspired to make his life intolerable, and when once more he found himself labouring on the old fortifications, he stepped along in the gang with a subdued leap in his gait, like a caged beast.

Long since he had renounced the hope of being freed by Cyril's conscience. He had never made any attempt to fasten the guilt on the real criminal; he shrank from the complex misery

it would bring upon all dear to him; and, moreover, his evidence, though absolutely convincing to himself, was purely conjectural. He could bring not one proof, no single witness, save the dumb cat, and that evidence, he well knew, would suffice only to convince the one person he most wished to be ignorant of the truth, Lilian herself.

The day on which he returned to the fortifications was hot and fiercely bright. The town was full of life. Gay carriages were bearing ladies in light summer bravery to garden-parties, afternoon dances on board ships, and other revels; bands were playing on piers; vessels of every kind, some gay with flags, dotted the Solent and the calm blue harbour; colours had been trooped on the common, troops had marched past the convicts; the sweet chimes of St. Thomas's had rung a wedding-peal; the great guns had thundered out royal salutes to the royal yacht as she bore the sovereign over to the green Wight;—there was such a rush and stir of life as quite bewildered Everard, and made the sharpest contrast to his grey and dreary prison life. To see those freest of free creatures, the street boys, sauntering or springing at will along the hot streets, or, casting off their dirty rags, flinging themselves into the fresh salt sea and revelling there like young Tritons, or balanced on rails, criticizing the passing troops, was maddening.

The day grew hotter, but pick and barrow had to be plied without respite, though the sweat poured from hot brows, and one man dropped. Everard saw that it was sunstroke, and not malingering, as the warder was inclined to think, and by his earnest representations got the poor creature proper treatment. The brassy sky grew lurid purple, and heavy growls of thunder came rumbling from the distance; some large drops of rain fell scantily; and then suddenly the sky opened from horizon to horizon and let down a sheet of vivid flame. Darkness followed, and a roar, as of all the artillery at Portsmouth firing and all its magazines exploding at once.

"Now or never," thought Everard, and, dropping his barrow at the end of his plank, he leapt straight ahead down into a waste patch, over which he sprang to the road. He ran for life and liberty with a speed he did not know himself capable of, straight on, blindly aiming at the shore, tearing off his cap and jacket and flinging them widely in different directions, as he went through the dark curtain of straight, rushing rain.

The warders, bewildered by the awful roar of the thunder, blinded by the fierce, quick dazzle of the lightning and the blackness of the all-concealing rain, did not at first miss him. It was

only when he leapt the palisade bounding the road, and showed through the rain-curtain a bare-headed, fugitive figure, that the grim guardian caught sight of him. Had he possessed the nerve to walk quietly out through the gate, he might have got off unobserved under cover of the storm.

Quick as thought, the warder, on seeing him, lifted his piece to his shoulder and fired. He was a good marksman, and his face lighted up with satisfaction as he hit his flying quarry, in spite of the bad light and confusing storm.

Everard felt a sharp, hot sting in the thigh, but ran on, his course marked with blood, which the friendly storm quickly washed away. The darkness became intenser, the lightning more blinding, the downrush of rain heavier, and the crashing of the thunder more deafening. Nevertheless, the alarm was given, and the pursuers were soon in full chase.

Down the now-deserted high-road dashed the fugitive, every faculty he possessed concentrated on flight. With the blind instinct of the hunted, he rushed at the first turning, through a gate, up some steps, along to the bastion which rose behind the powder-magazines. He darted along some pleasant green walk under the massy elms, till he reached the first sentry-box, in which stood the sentry, a stalwart Highlander, sheltering from the storm.

Instead of firing on him, as the desperate fugitive expected, the man stepped quickly aside, and the panting runner, divining his friendly purpose, ran into the box.

The soldier swiftly resumed his station, and stood looking out with an immovable face as before, while the hunted convict, in the darkness in the narrow space at his side, stood face inwards, close pressed to the wooden wall, soaked to the skin, and panting in hard gasps that were almost groans, yet sufficiently master of himself to press a wad of folded trouser on the bleeding wound, which proved to be only a flesh graze, but which might ruin the friendly Scot by its damning stains on the floor of the box.

"Quiet's the word," said the hospitable sentry, and nothing more.

Some minutes passed. Everard's breathing became less laboured, and his reflections more agonized; the thunder-peals grew less tremendous, while the rain became heavier. The pursuers had lost sight of their prey in the road before he reached the gate, and had been thrown off the scent, while still sending searchers in all directions. Two of those turned up through the gate, and one explored all the nooks and crannies of the crescent-shaped space walled by the bastion which sheltered the powder-

magazines, while the other examined the path itself, and interrogated the sentry.

"Past the Garrison Chapel, towards High Street; out of my range," he said coolly; and the pursuer, calling his comrade, flew with him along the bastion, not stopping to inquire of the other sentries. "Gone away," observed the Highlander to his quivering guest, who had feared lest his light-coloured dress might betray him behind the sentry, whose plaid and kilt and feather bonnet filled up all of the opening not darkened by his tall figure. "Off the scent. What next, mate?"

"Heaven knows! I only hope I may not ruin you. If I get off I will not forget you. My friends are well off, and I am——"

"Henry Everard. Seen you often with your gang—recognized at once."

"Good heavens!" cried Everard, not seeing his host's handsome face, but feeling a vague stir of memory at his voice; "who are you?"

"Private Walker, 179th Highlanders. Was Balfour of Magdalene."

"Balfour? What! come to this? What did we not expect of you?"

"Wear a better coat than yours. Manby rough on you—hard lines. Do anything for you."

"You always were a good-hearted fellow. And I was innocent, Balfour; I had not the faintest grudge against the poor fellow. But how did you come to this? You took honours."

"Governor poor—large family—small allowance at Oxford—debts—Jews. Called to bar—small allowance again—no briefs—more debts—more Jews. Governor suggests Australia—all up here—didn't see boiling tallow in Australia—if a day-labourer, why not in England? Always liked the service—enlisted—Hussar regiment—jolly life—saw service—full sergeant—time expired. Sent into Reserve—not allowed to re-enlist—name of Smith. Tried civil life—down on my luck again—deserted from reserve—re-enlisted in Highlanders—name of Walker—enlistment fraudulent—liable to imprisonment—foreign service soon—all right. Now for you?"

Everard had to confess that he did not in the least know what to do next, unless he could hide till the darkness rendered his dress unobservable. The moment he was seen he would be recognized anywhere as a convict. Various schemes were revolved between them as rapidly as possible, for it was essential that Everard should leave the sentry-box for a better hiding-place

before the rapid diminishing of the storm should once more open the bastion to observers.

The massive foliage of the elms hard by might have hidden a regiment, and Balfour had observed that the branches attracted no suspicion on the part of the pursuers, and, as the forking of the boughs did not begin till many feet off the ground, and the broad, smooth trunk offered not the smallest foothold, it was impossible for a man to climb into them unassisted.

But the sentry remembered that a stout rope had been flung aside there by some gunners busy cleaning the cannon on the bastion that day. If Everard could find this, and fling it over a bough, he might hoist himself up. If he could not find it, the soldier offered to come and lend him his shoulder—an action that might attract observation even in the darkness of the storm, since that part of the bastion was commanded by many windows, and that would, if discovered, bring certain ruin upon both men.

Everard departed swiftly from the box, and groped about in the wet grass till he found the rope. This, in the still blinding rain, he threw over the lowest stout branch, keeping one end, and fearful lest the other would not descend within reach. After a couple of casts, however, he succeeded in bringing the second end, in which he had fastened a stone, within easy reach, then grasping both, and planting his feet against the broad bole, slippery with wet, managed to struggle up with moderate speed. He was half-way up, and, pausing a moment to steady himself and look round, saw to his infinite horror that he was exactly opposite to, and in full view and firing range of, the sentry on the opposite end of the bastion, which was roughly crescent-shaped.

Outlined as he was, and almost stationary against the tree-trunk, he presented the easiest target for a moderate range shot. The man was in no hurry for his easy prey, he lifted his musket slowly, while Everard paused, transfixed with horror. The sentry seemed as if waiting for him to rise into a still better position for a shot. Everard slipped down, expecting to hear a ball sing over his head, if not into his body; but there was no report, and he stood irresolute a moment, seeking where to fly.

A signal of warning and haste from Balfour made him once more grasp his rope in desperation, and climb through the peril of the sentry's aim. A flash of lightning showed him his foe standing as before, with his musket planted firmly in front of him; he was supporting himself placidly with both hands clasped upon it, and his head bent slightly down, almost as if he had fallen asleep at his post.

But Everard knew that the most careless sentries do not fall

asleep in the process of aiming at fugitive prisoners, and pressed on till he reached the first fork, where he rested, wondering why no shot had been fired. The fact was, the rain was beating straight into the man's face, and he had much ado to see a yard before him, and had raised his musket merely to see if the breech was properly shielded from the wet. Everard, however, hoisting up his rope, climbed higher into his green fortress, expecting nothing less than to have it soon riddled in all directions by a fusillade from below. To his surprise he heard Balfour's signal of safety, and gladly responded to it; for they had framed a little code of signals before parting.

It was comparative luxury to the weary, wounded man to sit astride a branch, with his back against the trunk, and the foot of the wounded limb supported upon a lower bough, and he gave a sigh of deep relief, and reflected that he was at last, after all those dreary years of bondage, free. Balfour could do nothing till he was off guard, which would happen in another half-hour. Nothing could be done during the next sentry's guard, because it would be impossible to get at him and see how far he could be trusted; but if any subsequent sentry proved manageable, and if Balfour could get a pass for the night, he might bring him some sort of clothing, and then, under favourable circumstances, he might get off. And then?

The storm abated, the last low mutterings of thunder died away in the distance, the rain ceased, and the evening sun shone out with golden clearness. Some of the long slanting beams pierced the green roof of his airy prison, and fell hopefully upon the fugitive's face. He heard the sentry's measured tread below, and then the change of guard; the hum of the town, and the noises from the vessels at anchor, came, mingled with distant bugle-calls, to his lonely tower. The light faded, the sun went down in glory, the gun on the bastion fired the sunset, the parish church chimed half-past eight, the sounds from sea and shore came more distinct on the quieting night air, and he heard the band of a Highland regiment begin its skirl of pipes on the Clarence Pier. It was probably Balfour's regiment.

Poor Balfour! He fell to thinking of his unfortunate lot, much as he had to occupy his thoughts with regard to his own immediate destiny. Only that week, Balfour's father, General Sir Ronald Balfour, K.C.B., as general commanding at Portsmouth, had reviewed the troops, Balfour himself being more than once face to face with his father. This he told Everard, adding that on a recent foreign royal visit to Portsmouth, the 179th had formed a guard of honour to the royal guests, and that Admiral

Everard had walked down the lane of which he made a part, in the wake of the royal party, chancing to come to a full stop just on his level.

Balfour, the star of the Debating Society, the man whom they had hoped to see on the Woolsack; what a fall was here! "Unlucky beggar!" was the philosophic Highlander's sole comment on his ill-starred destiny. A good fellow, and a man without a vice.

The air was chill after sunset. Everard, motionless on his airy perch, bareheaded, and in his shirt-sleeves, was wet to the skin, and shivered with a double chill after the heat of his hard labour in the sultry afternoon. His wound ached till he began to fear it might lame him, and his hunger waxed keener as the night deepened and the cold increased. The stars came out and looked at him with their friendly, quieting gaze. He could see the sparkle of lights in the water and in the town; he could make out the lights of the admiral's signal-station on his housetop above the dockyard.

Which man-of-war was Keppel's? he wondered, knowing nothing even of the outside world that was so near him. The chimes of the parish church told him the hours, and he knew when the guard would be relieved.

It was a weary night; its minutes lagged by leaden-paced. He thought their long procession would never end; and yet there was a strange, delicious enchantment in the feeling that he had at last broken the bars of that iron prison, with its terrible bondage of unbending routine and drudgery. The thick foliage of the elm still held the wet, which every passing breath of the night wind shook on to the grass below in a miniature shower. The moon rose and wandered in pale majesty across the sweet blue sky—such a free, broad night sky as had not blessed his eyes for years and years; its beams hung his green fortress roof with pearls and trembling diamonds, falling ever and anon to the earth. Sentinel after sentinel came on guard below, but there was no friendly signal from beneath. He had descended to the lowest bough to catch the slightest sound. The watch was passing; the early dawn would shine on the next watch, and, if help did not come before the sunrise, he would have to wait till the following night, wet, starved, suffering as he was. But no; there is the welcome signal at last.

Quickly he gave the answering signal; and, bending down in the darkness, heard the following sentence above the sound of the sentinel's backward and forward steps:—"Sentry blind and deaf—sneak off to right. Catch."

Something flew up to him in the dark, and, after two misses, he caught it; and then, rising to where a rift in the foliage let in a shaft of rays from the waning moon, unfastened his bundle, which was roughly tied with string.

A battered hat, very large, so that it would hide the close-cropped head; a boatman's thick blue jersey; and a pair of wide trousers, worn and stained, with a belt to fasten them; also some second-hand boots—such was the simple but sufficient wardrobe which Balfour had purchased with his slender means, and brought him at deadly risk.

Everard was able to discard every rag of the tell-tale prison garb, stamped all over as it was with the broad arrow, and, securing the dangerous garments to a branch of the tree, invested himself in the contents of the bundle—an occupation that took so long, owing to the inconvenience of his lofty dressing-room, that the eastern sky was brightening and the friendly sentinel's watch almost expired by the time he was ready to descend from his perch, which he did noiselessly and apparently unobserved by the sentry.

Then, slowly and painfully—for his limbs were cramped and chilled, and his wound ached—he glided behind the dark boles till he reached the steps, and, descending them, found to his dismay that the gate was locked.

CHAPTER V.

THERE is almost always some small but vitally important hitch in the best-laid human plans, and the hitch in Balfour's arrangement was that he forgot the nightly locking of the gate leading on to the bastion. He had approached the tree from the other side, passing the sentries, being challenged by them, and giving the word in reply.

Everard knew the bastion, and had had many a pleasant stroll there in old days, when stopping with his father when in port, and he knew well that his only course was now to climb the gate, which he could not do without noise, and which was in no case an easy feat, the plain boards of which the gate was made being high, and the top thickly studded with those dreadful crooked nails, which look like alphabets gone wrong, and do dreadful damage both to hands and clothing.

Fortunately the moon had set, the sun was not yet risen, and

the darkness favoured him—a darkness which every moment threatened to dissipate. He struggled up with as little sound as possible, with set teeth and a beating heart, lacerating his hands cruelly. Then, having gained the top—not without some rents in his scanty clothing—he grasped the nail-studded ridge and sprang down. Alas! not to the ground, for one of the crooked nails caught in the back part of the wide trousers, and, with a rending of cloth and a knocking of his feet against the boards, he found himself arrested midway, and suspended by the waist against the gate, like a mole on a keeper's paling.

Had he been caught in front, he might have saved himself and somehow torn himself free; but being hooked thus in the rear, he was almost helpless, and his slightest effort to free himself brought the heels of his boots knocking loudly against the gate as if to obtain admittance, which was the last thing he wanted. Meantime, the minutes flew on, the darkness was breaking fast; before long the sun would rise, and disclose him hung thus helplessly on his nail to the earliest passer-by, who would probably be a policeman.

A beautiful faint flush of rose-red suddenly shot up over the eastern sky, and the brown shadows lessened around him. He heard footsteps echoing through the dewy stillness, and struggled with blind desperation. The rose-red turned deep glowing orange, objects became more and more distinct before him, the street lamps sickened, a soft orange ray shot straight from the sea across the common, through the leaves of the tree shadowing the gate, on to the fugitive's cheek. At the same instant he heard the boom of the sunrise gun; it was day.

The footsteps approached nearer and nearer; on the bastion he heard the change of watch. He felt that all was lost, and yet, in his mental tension, his chief consciousness was of the awful beauty of the dawn, the dewy quiet and freshness brooding over the great town, and—strange contrast!—the grotesque absurdity of his situation. He heard the lively twitter of the birds waking in the trees, and admired the soft radiance of the ruddy beams on the sleeping town; and then something gave way, and he found himself full length on the pavement.

The echoing footsteps had as yet brought no figure round the corner, and Everard welcomed the hard salute of the paving-stones as the first greeting of freedom, and, quickly picking himself up, he fell into the slow, slouching walk he had observed in tramps, and moved on, adjusting his disordered garments as best he might. The footsteps proved indeed to be those of a policeman, whose eyes were dazzled with the level sunbeams which he

faced, and who gave him a dissatisfied but not suspicious glance and passed on.

Everard drew a deep breath and limped on, trying to disguise the lameness of the wounded limb, which he feared might betray him, and thrust his torn hands into the pockets of the trousers which had so nearly ruined him. His surprise and joy were great on touching with his left hand a substance which proved to be bread and cheese, which he instantly devoured, and with his right a few pence, and, what moved him to tears of gratitude for Balfour's thoughtful kindness, a short briarwood pipe, well-seasoned, and doubtless the good fellow's own, a screw of cheap tobacco, and some matches. He had not touched tobacco for nine years.

A drinking-fountain supplied him with the draught of water which his fevered throat and parched lips craved; it also enabled him to wash off some of the blood and dirt from his torn hands. And then, dragging his stiff and wounded limb slowly along, and eating his stale bread and cheese in the sweet sunshine, he made his morning orisons in the dewy quiet of the yet unawakened town, and felt a glow of intense gratitude, which increased as the food and water strengthened him, and exercise warmed his chill and stiffened frame.

He was glad to see the houses open one by one, and the streets begin to fill; he thought he should attract less attention among numbers. He passed groups of free labourers hurrying to the dockyard to work, and it gave him an eerie shudder to think that some of them, whose faces he knew, might recognize him. His terror increased when he saw a light on a workman's face—a face he knew well, for the man had slipped over the side of the dock one morning, and was in imminent danger of being jammed by some floating timber, when Everard had promptly sprung after him, regardless of prison discipline, and held him up, for he could not swim, till a rope was brought, and the two men were hauled out, bruised but otherwise uninjured.

The man stopped; Everard went straight on, not appearing to see him, and, after a few seconds, to his dismay, heard footsteps running after him. He dared not quicken his pace, lest he should attract attention, but the food he was eating stuck in his throat, and his face paled. His pursuer gained his side, and, seizing his hand, pressed some pence into it, saying, in a low tone, "Mum's the word, mate! All the ready I've got. Simon Jones, 80, King Street, for help. Better not stop."

Then he turned and resumed his road, telling his companions something about a chum of his down on his luck, and Everard

slouched on with a lightened heart, and increased gratitude for the pence. He had now nearly two shillings in his pockets, and when he had lighted Balfour's briarwood he felt like a king. The last time he handled a coin was when he gave pence to a blind man, sitting by the police-station at Oldport, just before his arrest. He bought needle and thread to repair the tremendous fissure in the unlucky garments which had played him so ill a trick, and in two hours' time found himself well clear of the town and suburbs. Presently he found a shed used for sheltering cattle, but now empty. This he entered, and, having with some difficulty drawn the chief rents in his clothes together, washed his wound in a trough placed for some cattle to drink from, and bandaged that and the worst hurts in his hand with the handkerchief in which the bread and cheese was wrapped, lay down on some litter behind a turnip-cutting machine, and in a moment was fast asleep, utterly oblivious of prisons, wounds, and hunger.

When he awoke, with the vague consciousness of change which heralds the first waking after a decisive event in life, he felt a strangely unprotected sensation on looking up at the blue sky, which showed through the gaps in the slightly thatched roof, and seeing a green pasture, with cattle grazing upon it, spread broad and sunny before him on the unwalled side of the shed, instead of the close white walls of his cell. His sleep had been so profound and refreshing that it took him some seconds to recall the events which preceded it. Hunger and the sun told him it was late afternoon; prudence bid him rest the wounded leg, but hunger counselled him to go out and buy food first.

A short walk along the dusty high-road brought him to a little general shop at the entrance to a village, where he bought a penny loaf and a little cheese, and was confounded by the affability of the mistress of the shop, a tidy young woman, with a child in her arms.

"Warm walking," she observed, as she weighed his cheese.

"It is warm," he faltered, with a strange embarrassment; for he had been addressed by no woman since the bitter hour of his parting from Lilian, nine years ago, and had a confused idea that he must be very respectful to every one in virtue of his low position.

"Tramped far?" she added, wrapping the morsel of cheese in paper.

"No, ma'am; only from Portsmouth," he replied; and, taking his purchase with a "Thank you" and a touch of his hat, he was limping out, when the woman called him back. "Seems to me you've been ill, and you've seen better days by the sound of your tongue," she said. "What have you eat to-day?"

"A good breakfast of bread and cheese."

"And you just out of hospital, as I can see! Poor chap! and your hand bad, too. Come into my room here, do. Here's some bacon and eggs my master left from dinner; I'll warm it up in a minute. We shan't miss it, and it will do you a sight more good than that poor bit you bought. Come on in, do, the children and me is just getting our teas."

Everard's instinctive courtesy bade him accept this kind offer, and he got a cup of hot tea and a good meal of warm food and, what was better than all, the refreshing sense of human kindness, and departed with gratitude, having won golden opinions from his hostess by his quiet civility and wise observations upon the teething of her infant.

He was grateful also for the hint about the hospital and the refinement of his speech, and resolved to adopt the broad Hampshire drawl, familiar to him from babyhood.

He trudged on with a better heart, bent chiefly on finding a refuge for the night. As he approached a pretty cottage, with a lawn before it and a garden behind, a pony-carriage passed him and drew up before the gate. It was driven by a lady in mourning, who looked inquiringly round before alighting. Everard ran up, touching his hat, and held the pony's head, while she got out, entered the wicket gate, rang the bell, and was admitted by a smart maid.

Here was luck at the very beginning. The lady, whose face he had not observed in the hurry, but whose dress and appearance as she walked up to the door he had ample leisure to study, was good for at least a shilling, and would ask him no questions; he might soon hope to buy a shirt. He patted the pony's sleek neck and knocked off a fly or two, and wished he knew of a high-road studded with ponies waiting to be held.

Then he looked at the two pretty children the lady had left in her carriage, and their sweet faces filled him with a sense of old familiar home-happiness, and his memory called up a pleasant summer scene on the lawn at Malbourne—of the twins, with little Marion between them, pretending to chase the big boy, Harry, who fled backwards as they advanced. He remembered the twins' black dresses, which they wore for one of the brothers they lost in infancy, and the scent of the lime-blossom overhead.

The children in the pony-carriage were prattling merrily together, and making comments on all they saw, himself not excepted. He had incautiously taken off his hot felt hat for a moment to cool himself as he stood by the pony, and this action greatly interested the younger child, a blue-eyed boy.

"Why is all 'oo hair cut off?" he asked, earnestly regarding him. "Has 'oo been to pizzen?"

"I have been ill, sir, and my head was shaved," replied Everard, colouring with dismay, and quickly jamming his hat well on, while the little maiden rebuked her brother for his rudeness.

"He did not mean to be rude," she exclaimed; "but we are staying with our grandpapa in the dockyard, and Ernest sees the convicts go by every day, so we play at convicts, and he cut his little brother's hair off to make it seem more real. Wasn't it naughty?"

"Very naughty," replied Everard, charmed with the music of the sweet little refined voices, a music he had not heard so long. The little girl reminded him of his old pet, Winnie.

"Why didn't 'oo die?" continued the boy. "Mine uncle did die. The soldiers put him on the big gun, and shooted him when he was in the ground, and the music played, and mamma kied."

"Hush, Ernie! I am glad you got well, poor man!" said the little maid, demurely.

"When I grow up," proceeded the boy, "I sall be a admiral, like grandpa, and have sips and guns and a sword."

Everard congratulated him on his choice; but his little sister said he had better be a clergyman like their father, and make people good and preach.

"I don't want to peach," said the little man, pathetically. "I want to be a admiral, and have sips and guns and swords."

Then the door opened, and the lady came out, accompanied by another lady in a widow's cap, who nodded to the children and smiled, though she had just been weeping, and went in; and Everard, with an intelligence sharpened almost to agony by the children's conversation, looked searchingly from under the hat he had slouched over his brows at the dark-haired, dark-eyed lady, as she returned to her carriage, replacing the veil, which she had raised during her visit, evidently a sorrowful one, since she too had been shedding tears.

Everard's heart throbbed almost to bursting as he met the dark eyes, once so full of mirth and life, and observed the familiar carriage of the still slender figure. It was Marion, beyond all doubt; Marion, altered indeed, but still Marion, the favourite sister, the darling of his youth—*that traitor's wife*, as he muttered between his fiercely ground teeth. Twice nine years might have passed over her head, to judge by her looks. The joyous elasticity was gone from her carriage; she was pale, and there were lines of settled care on the once-sparkling face.

She smiled on her children, a tender, sweet smile, but with no

happiness in it, and hoped they had been good, as she got into the carriage and took the reins, not observing the man, who stood by the pony with his breath coming gaspingly, and his heart torn by a medley of passionate emotions. He stepped back when she had taken the reins and whip, and touched his hat as she drove on, and then stopped on catching sight of him, and drew out her purse, whence she took a shilling, which she gave him. He touched his hat once more, and was again stepping back, when she beckoned him forwards and addressed him.

"Are you out of work?" she asked; and he replied slowly in the affirmative.

"That is strange," she continued, with a little severity. "A man of your age and strength ought to have no difficulty in getting work just now. The farmers want men, and the dock-yard is taking on extra hands for the extension works. I hope it is not drink?"

"It is nine years since I touched any drink," he replied, for the second time moved to discover himself and ask for the money indispensable to his safety, and for the second time restrained by the thought that she was the wife of *that traitor*, whose money would have been like fire to his touch.

"He was ill, and they did cut off him hair," explained the boy.

"You think of nothing but cutting hair, darling," said Marion, smiling the tender, sad smile again; "I am sorry for that," she added, addressing Everard kindly. "And you are looking for work? Have you been long out of hospital? Where are your friends? What! no friends? This is very sad. Try the dock-yard. I will speak for you to the officials. My father is port-admiral. But I am going home to-morrow; my husband preaches at home on Sunday. Or stay! they want a man at once to mow the lawn at this cottage; their gardener is ill. Can you mow?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Say Mrs. Maitland recommends you. I am sure I may recommend you. You look honest and steady. I wish I could help you, but I have so little time now. Can you read? Yes? Then I will give you a little paper my husband wrote specially for working men. Out of that packet, Marion."

The little girl's sweet gold curls drooped over the bag, which she opened, and she drew out a great bundle of tracts, whence she took one and handed it to Everard with the Maitland grace and smile. Her eyes were like Lilian's, and, looking into their sweet depths, Everard let the tract fall clumsily into his brown

hand, where one of the lacerations was bleeding afresh, so that the paper was quickly stained with his blood.

"Oh, his poor hand, mother!" cried the child, pitifully. "Mayn't I give him my handkerchief to tie it up?"

Everard objected, saying any rag would serve the purpose; but Marion bid him take it, saying that children should learn to give. Then the boy took a box half-full of chocolate-comfits and pressed it on him, "To make 'oo hand well," he said. Marion smiled, and the tears clouded Everard's eyes, and he remembered how the twins used to give away their very garments to tramps unless closely watched.

He stood long looking after the pony-carriage till the last gleam of the two golden heads vanished, and the mist over his eyes fell in two great drops on his face; then he remembered his chance of work at the cottage, and walked up to the door in some trepidation, and pulled the bell. He thought of Marion's tears for Leslie, and wondered if she would shed any if she heard of his death. Would she be relieved, as the others doubtless would, and think it best so? Did she ever tell the children of another uncle, their father's friend, lost before they were born? "Mamma kied" when the soldier uncle was borne with honour to his grave; but she let her children play at convicts, and watch their dolorous daily procession for pastime.

The door opened. "We don't want no tramps here!" cried a shrill voice; and a hand banged the door in his face again, and he stood confounded in the porch. Then he stepped back and took a survey of the house, and was much relieved to see the young widow at a writing-table, just within an open window on the ground floor.

He went up when he caught her eye. "If you please, ma'am, I heard you wanted a gardener," he said, lifting his hat.

"And they banged the door in your face," she replied gently. "But why did you not go to the back door? The girl was naturally angry."

The back door was another custom to learn. He faltered out an apology, and then proffered his request for work. "I am not a regular gardener, but I can mow and do odd jobs, and badly want work, being just out of hospital," he said.

"I am only a lodger," replied the widow; "but I will ask." And she rang the bell and summoned the landlady, and, to Everard's surprise, asked her as a favour to employ him. "You see that photograph, Mrs. Brown?" she said, pointing to one of an officer in regimentals on the table before her. "Now, don't you see a likeness?"

"To whom?" asked the bewildered woman; and Mrs. Everard indicated Henry by a slight gesture.

"You will think me foolish, but I cannot mistrust one so like——" Here she burst into tears, and Mrs. Brown lifted her hands in dismay.

"Poor dear! her wits are troubled by her loss," she thought. "That ragged tramp like the poor gentlemen in his smart uniform, indeed!"

"I certainly see no likeness, ma'am," she replied, after a long and depreciating glance at the tattered figure on the lawn, "but I'll do anything to pleasure you, and I do want the grass done, and even if the man isn't honest——"

"I was to say that Mrs. Maitland recommended me. I held her pony just now," interposed Everard.

This ended the discussion; and in a minute or two Everard found himself, scythe in hand, busily mowing the little lawn, to the great discomfort of his torn hands, which he had to bind afresh as well as he could. However, he got through his task in a couple of hours, swept the turf clean, nailed up a creeper or two, and did one or two odd jobs about the place for the damsel who had dismissed him with such scorn, and did not leave the cottage till after dark.

Whenever he paused in his work and looked up, he saw Mrs. Everard's eyes bent wistfully upon him, and knew that she was comparing his features with Leslie's. Marion had not recognized the playfellow and companion of her youth, but this woman's eyes were made keen-sighted by love and sorrow, and traced out the ordinary fraternal resemblance beneath the disguise of the weather-browned, tattered vagrant. His heart warmed to her and to the child, who ran about, prattling and getting in the way of his unsuspected kinsman. If Leslie had been alive, he felt that he could have asked him for succour.

That night he passed on a half-made rick of hay, a fragrant, warm, and luxurious couch, sheltered from the sky by a sheet of sailcloth spread tentwise to keep off showers.

He thought it better not to seek work so near the town, since he had wherewith to get food for the day, so he set off northwards, and walked as far as his wounded leg would let him, revolving many schemes for escape in his mind as he went along. He took out his tract, "Plain Words for Plain Men," and read it with inward sarcasm. It was beautifully written and lucidly expressed; by the Rev. Canon Maitland, Rector of St. Swithun's, at some country town, Rural Dean; author of several religious works set down in due order

"So he is a canon, is he?" muttered Everard, fiercely, as he limped along in the burning sunshine. "How long does it take to grow into an archbishop, I wonder? And how much damned hypocrisy and lying and treachery does it take to make one?" and he tore the paper into a hundred fragments and dashed it into the road-dust, where he stamped savagely upon it. Then he thought of Marion and the sweet children who were kind to the ragged vagrant, and his heart contracted with a wild pain.

At noon he rested in a wood, where a thick undergrowth of hazels made a shelter from eyes as well as from the sun. On the mossed and tangled roots of an ash-tree, he sat at the edge of the hazel wall, just where the ground sloped down to a little stream, which bickered over its mossy pebbles with a pleasant sound, and caught in its tiny wave the cool lights glancing through the wind-stirred boughs above it.

This was better than prison, Everard thought, as he stretched his weary, hot limbs at length on the dry, short grass, and gazed up through the gently waving, sun-steeped leaves at glimpses of blue sky, and listened to the brook's low and soothing song and the whispering of the laughing leaves, and smelt the vague, delicious scent of the woodlands, and forgot the aching of his wounds and the cough which had shaken him since the chills of his night in the wet elm-tree.

For the moment he wanted nothing more. It would be sweet, after these long years of toil and prison, to wander thus for ever in the beautiful summer weather quite alone, his whole being open to the half-forgotten influences of free earth and sky, fields and streams and woods, sunrises and sunsets and solemn nights marked by the quiet marshalling of the stars, till he was healed of the grievous hurts of his long agony. Even the hunted feeling, the necessity for hiding and being ever on the alert, even the danger that dogged every step, was refreshing and stimulating. This wild life was full of adventure, and roused his faculties, which the iron hand of bondage had benumbed.

The simple meal he had purchased tasted deliciously, the brook's water was like sparkling wine in comparison with that of the prison. For company his cell boasted at most an occasional spider; while here in the wood were a thousand friendly guests, flying, creeping, swimming, humming, peeping at him with bright, shy eyes, chirping, and even singing a fragmentary song in the noonday heat.

A wren, beguiled by his long stillness and the tempting crumbs he strewed, hopped up within an inch of his motionless hand, and pecked pertly at the unusual dainty. Everard

remembered the wren he had seen on his last day of liberty, the wren which nestled on Lilian's muff and let her touch him, while he and Cyril looked on, and Cyril said that it was Lilian's guilelessness which gave her such power over dumb creatures. He remembered asking Cyril how he, who was equally guileless, had lost this power, and Cyril's agonized rejoinder, "Henry, I am a man."

CHAPTER VI.

After his simple meal, Everard spread his treasures on the grass before him, and eyed them lovingly. It was so long since he had possessed anything save his own soul, and that he could scarcely keep from the devil's clutch, that he enjoyed them more than those who possess their own bodies and the labour of their hands, and perchance much more, can imagine.

The first treasure was the box of comfits, with the gay picture on the lid, which had doubtless charmed the innocent gaze of its boy owner. It had contracted a slight strain, which vexed him, but he ate one of the comfits slowly and luxuriously, and it made a glorious dessert. By its side, carefully secured from flying away by a pebble, lay the little handkerchief with its initials, M. L. M. He had not used it for his hand, but had begged rags instead.

It seemed sacrilege to make use of this sole token of little Marion's sweet nature, but it would be a capital bag for the money which glittered on the grass before him, Marion's shilling among it; that he resolved to change only in dire need. Balfour's pipe was the next treasure, and into that he put the last of the screw of tobacco, and smoked it with a happy heart, thinking gratefully of the woman who gave him meat, and of Leslie's widow and her kindness to him. She too had brought him out a cup of tea during his mowing, and the little child had carried him a great hunch of seed-cake, and though these had been welcome enough, the gentle words and looks had far outweighed them. Musing on these things, he fell fast asleep, with the unguarded treasures by his side, and did not wake till late afternoon, startled, but reassured to find his possessions intact.

He had hitherto chosen field-paths as much as possible, always keeping a high-road in sight, and shaping his course by the sun; but now it became necessary to take to the road, which was full of dangers for him. He met a policeman or two, each of whom eyed him curiously and doubtfully, and one of whom accosted

him, and put him through a series of questions as to whence he came, whither he went, and what was his name and occupation; to which Everard, with inward tremors, answered calmly enough.

His name was Stone; he was just out of hospital; he was tramping to his friends, who lived on the other side of London, and was glad to do odd jobs on the road, if the policeman could put him in the way of such. The policeman, who was not a very brilliant fellow, was perfectly satisfied to let him pass, though he was actually, like all the police around, on the look-out for a man of his height, figure, and appearance.

As he drew near a little village, he saw a provision-waggon, drawn by a pair of horses, standing outside a public-house; the good fellow who drove it was absent, and doubtless refreshing himself in the cosy bar withim. Everard passed on through the village, and read the milestone at the other end, which recorded the number of miles to London. He had only lessened the record by twelve that day, and made up his mind to tramp far into the night, if his strength held out.

A great clatter suddenly arose behind him, and, turning, he saw the provision-waggon pelting down the sloping village street with no one on the box. He rushed back, putting up his arms and shouting; one or two men followed his example, and at the top of the hill he saw the driver, red-faced and breathless, pursuing the horses, whip in hand. The runaways cantered on, and Everard threw himself upon them, grasping the near horse's head, but he was carried off his feet and dropped; then he rose and caught them again, till he succeeded in stopping them, after a very plucky struggle. The driver offered him a lift, which he gratefully accepted, together with some tobacco, and they jogged on till night, when they reached a country town.

Passing the town, Everard walked on till after midnight, and then slept under a haystack. Early next morning he went into a farmyard, where he saw a farmer sending his men off to work, and boldly asked for a job, and found himself, after a little hesitation and questioning, among a haymaking gang, with whom he worked till evening, obtaining permission to sleep in a barn that night, and the promise of work on the Monday, that being Saturday night.

He was glad enough to lie still that Sunday morning, and rest on the bundles of straw which made his couch, listening to the drowsy chime of the church bells, and enjoying the luxury of a roof which was not a prison, until increasing hunger compelled him to rise soon after noon. As he passed through the farmyard, he saw a red-armed maid feeding the pigs with skim milk and

cold potatoes, on which he cast as wistful an eye as the prodigal did on the swine's husks.

He was passing on, when the farmer's wife, rustling in her Sunday silk, came in on her way from church; Henry touched his hat and opened the gate for her, while she asked him rather sharply why he was hanging about the place. He told her that, being very weary, he had but just risen, and promised not to come again till night.

"We are obliged to be careful about harbouring strangers," she said, softened by his reply. "We never know who they may be; escaped convicts from Portsmouth as often as not. One convict got loose only the other day in the thunderstorm, and may be hiding about here, for all we know. Where are you going to get dinner? At the public-house? A bad place. Maria, bring out the pie that was left yesterday, and a mug of ale. And after you've eaten it, you can be off. There's church this afternoon, if you'd only got clothes to go in."

Everard dined very happily on the low stone wall of the court-yard, though a meat pasty with good gravy is not the most convenient dish to eat with the fingers. He effected a total clearance, however, to the deep admiration of Maria, who watched to see that he did not make away with the dish and mug, and went on his way refreshed.

He got paper, pen, and ink at a public-house that afternoon, and wrote a long letter to Lilian, telling her of his escape, and asking her to send a few pounds to him at the post-office of that little village.

He would have felt less pain in applying for money to Lilian than to any of those on whom he had a more direct claim, but who had so totally cast him off. As it chanced, however, she had his watch and chain, which he had lent to Mrs. Maitland on the very morning of his arrest, and he only needed the value of that for his immediate purpose, which was to get decent working garments, and, as soon as his hair was grown, to try for a passage to America. If Lilian cared to apply to his family, and they offered large aid, well. He would not refuse help, save from Cyril; but he would not ask it.

He worked on for three or four days, till the farmer had got all his hay in; then he was obliged to try elsewhere, and, in trying, lost several days. Every few days he returned to Hawkburne to see if there were any answer to his letter, and every time he got a negative from the postmistress a keener disappointment seized him. He got a day's work here and an hour's job there during the next fortnight, but no regular work.

When he got money, he dared not spend it on a good meal; he knew that he must husband it for the days when there was no work. What with poor food and open-air sleeping, and the cough and rheumatism which he got that night in the damp tree, he fell into poor condition, and, though his hands were almost healed, and the gunshot-wound no longer caused him to limp, people did not care to employ such a gaunt, starved, hollow-cheeked man.

He had passed three weeks in liberty, and had been several days without any work; for it was an unfortunate time. Haymaking was just ended, and harvest not yet begun; everybody was at leisure, and no one wanted any odd jobs done. His only chance was to wait till harvest. But waiting was the difficulty. He looked at the richly waving fields, mellowing day by day, and knew by their tints that it must be a week or two before the first was ready for the scythe. How close at hand harvest seemed to the farmers and their busy housewives! Visits must be paid and purchases made in the town because harvest was so near; but how far off it seemed to Everard, seen across a gulf of starvation! The workhouse meant certain detection and capture; he resolved to beg.

He had been two days without food, and dragged his faint limbs back to Hawkburne late one Sunday afternoon, to inquire once more for the letter and remittance, which surely could not fail to have arrived now. In the event of being absent or ill, Lilian must have got his letter by this time, and would certainly send a reply at once, even if by another hand. It was scarcely worth while to beg on the road back to Hawkburne, help being so near. He pulled himself together, and entered the little post-office with quite a jaunty air; but one glance at the postmistress was enough. She shook her head before he had time to speak.

"Nothing for you, Stone."

"Are you quite sure? Have you looked?" he asked, turning many shades paler.

"Looked? yes. And nice trouble I've had with you worrying day after day these three weeks, and much thanks I get for it," she replied snappishly; for it was Saturday, and she had just taken her hands from the scrubbing-pail for the third time for nothing, and had had nobody at hand to scold all the afternoon, and the baby had just awoke with a terrific screech.

"I am sorry to have troubled you," he returned; "but I cannot understand it. The letter was so important. My friends know how desperately hard up I am, and the remittance was my own money."

"I dare say. Why don't you take and go to your friends?

Keeping me here all day, and this blessed child"—she had run and fetched the infant, which was screaming and kicking with fifty-baby power in her arms—"a precious dear! and its mother worried with tramps then. There, there!"

"I thought, perhaps," he added, raising his voice above the maddening din, "it might have been overlooked. Accidents do happen, ma'am, however careful people are. If you would be so kind as to search again."

"I dare say, indeed! There! look yourself then, unbelieving Jew—there, there, mother's precious!—and get along out of my shop with you this minute!"

"If you would give me a sheet of paper for the love of Heaven, and let me write again."

"Go on out of the shop, I tell ye!" cried the angry woman, deaf to all his entreaties.

He sat down in the hedge by the roadside in utter despair. What if Lilian were dead? Even then others would read the letter. Had she forgotten him? It entered his heart like a sharp knife. But no; Lilian could not desert even an insect in its pain. His hands, in which his face rested, were wet; he found he had been crying in his disappointment, and he was not ashamed. He cried on, dimly conscious of bodily exhaustion and illness, and after a time got up, feeling that he must do something; he knew not what.

Now that there was no longer hope to buoy him up, he found a difficulty in walking in his weakness and pain. He dragged himself to the Rectory and begged. The rector, a rich man and a generous, drove him from the door. He never encouraged tramps, Stone should go to the workhouse, he said. He next tried a comfortable house, in which some wealthy maiden ladies lived, with no better success. The ladies and their maids were frightened to death at the sight of him, and threatened to send one John—who, if he were other than a phantom of the ladies' own conjuring, was truly of a singular taciturnity, and possessed of the power of making himself invisible—for the police.

Everard wandered down the neat gravel path with a sick heart; and, turning up a lane, he came upon a cottage, where a poorly dressed woman stood nursing a child at the gate. He would not beg of her; but she, who knew him by sight and name, as having helped at haymaking with her husband, accosted him, and asked if he had got work and the remittance he expected. He shook his head in reply, and she asked when he had last eaten, when he again shook his head, and smiled faintly. She looked at him with a pitiful expression, and bid him walk in and rest, which he was glad to do.

Then she warmed some cold tea and cold potatoes, and set them before him, apologizing for the poor fare, and observing that her husband, whom Everard knew to be a drinking man, had not yet come home with the weekly wage. Wolfishly as he had eyed the good creature's simple cookery, Everard found that he could not finish what was set before him; he was too far gone.

That night he passed in a half-ruined and disused cattle-shed, not far from Hawkburne, and in the morning he rose and trudged along the high-road to the next village, asking an occasional alms when he fell in with the church-goers, but getting none. The little belfry of the village church, the name of which he never knew, had a sweet peal of bells. Their sweetness charmed him to tears, and he thought how pleasant it would be to go to church once more, a free man; so, after the congregation had entered the little fane, he dragged his fast-failing limbs into the churchyard, and looked in through the lower part of the lozenged-paned window, the top of which was open.

The interior of the cool dark church, with its low, heavy stone arches, sculptured tombs, and rustic worshippers, ranged in orderly quiet, was a refreshing spectacle to the outcast's eyes, and, leaning on the broad stone window-ledge, he saw and heard all. The Psalms were being read, and his heart bounded strangely as he heard, "When the Lord turned the captivity of Zion, then were we like unto them that dream; then was our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with joy." Surely his captivity was to be turned at last.

The organ pealed, and the simple chants fell pleasantly on his ear; but his head swam so that he lost parts of the service, and those verses rang on through his mind. He roused up during the Second Lesson, and heard, with deep emotion, the following passages:—"I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: sick and in prison, and ye visited me;"—and a sensation of awe and horror fell upon him when he realized that a whole congregation of Christian worshippers sat listening to those words of terrible and tender meaning, while he was perishing within earshot, unregarded. Of some of them he had begged in vain; the man who was even then reading, "Lord, when saw we thee hungry and fed thee?" was the very man who drove him but yesterday from his door, sick and starving; of the others he felt he dared not beg.

Then he remembered that his brother George was, perhaps, then reading those very words, "When saw we thee in prison?" and Cyril, the traitor Cyril, in his large town church, was most probably reading them too, reading them in his voice of magnifi-

cent power and pathos to an awed multitude. In every church in the land those awful and beautiful words were being read, and yet he knew that no help could come to him. "Depart from me, ye cursed," burst forth the rector, with sudden sonorous energy, and Everard shuddered and sent up an agonized prayer for Cyril.

The sun was hot, and he grew weary of his place by the window, and sat down among the green graves beneath a shady tree till the congregation came out. Then he rose, when they were all gone, and knocked at the first cottage door he reached, having learnt by this time that the poor are better almoners of hand-to-hand charity than the rich, because they know better what it is to go without a meal. Some bread was put in his hands, with words he was too dazed to hear; but he found, on trying to eat the bread, that he could not swallow it.

All that day he lay in a field, and at evening rose with difficulty, and asked for a night's shelter; for the dews were chilly, and he knew that he was now too ill to bear exposure. It was refused.

He wandered a little further on, and sank on the bare earth in a sort of stupor, from which he was roused by the chilly dawning of the next day. He was on a bank beneath a large lime-tree, by the side of a brook, which sang in quiet undertones, like the brook in the wood where he dined so happily when first at liberty. He could not move.

At first it seemed terrible to face death thus, outcast and alone, and all the scenes of his life flashed past him, and the strange anguish which falls on us at the thought of dying in the midst of sorrow, before any hope has been fulfilled, seized upon him with vulture beak.

Did his mother bear him with bitter pains for this, to die in his prime of want and hardship? All the high hopes and rich promise of his youth smote upon him with keen anguish, and Cyril's one message to him in prison, "He shall make thy righteousness clear as the light, and thine innocence as the noonday," shot across his brain in letters of fire.

Some feeling of family pride revived within him, and he thought how much harder it was for an Everard to perish by the way than for one born by the wayside and nurtured in want. He thought of Leslie. Did he lie alone thus face to face with death, when he got the wound which in the end proved fatal? How different that dying on the field of honour must have been! And yet, how small, how phantom-like everything earthly seemed in that hour of tremendous reality! Did not one event happen to all?

The green fields, dewy bright in the rising sun, reeled before

him, and he summoned his failing forces and applied them to prayer for all who had been dear to him.

He was now no more alone; the sweet and awful consciousness of a Divine Presence came upon his calmed soul. Lilian's beautiful voice seemed to speak passages full of mighty hope from the Scriptures; he heard the brook's low murmur and the light whisper of the leaves above his head. He seemed to be resting on some kind arm, which was now Lilian's, now an angel's, and the rose-flushed morning sky at which he gazed opened and disclosed indistinct forms moving in light. He saw his mother's face, Leslie's, the baby Maitlands, so long dead; majestic presences, spiritual beings, souls of the noble dead hovered near in august silence, through which a mighty music of unutterable joy swept in melodious thunders.

The vision vanished in a keen chill, and he woke to find rain pattering on his upturned face. The fresh shower renewed his sinking energies, and cleared his brain; some animal instinct told him day was declining. He knew that the bitterness of death was past. It was sweet to feel the soft rushing of the cool rain on his face; it seemed a pleasant thing to die thus, to cease from painful being, and mingle with the kindly elements and dissolve into the gracious components of the great universe.

The brook sang on, and the leaves rustled lovingly together, and a little wren suddenly let its strong heart of song loose upon the air; such a volume of melody from such a tiny breast! He remembered what Cyril said one day of the wren's song—"If the mere joy of animal existence evokes such a passion of rapture, what must be the fulness of bliss called forth by the consciousness of pure spiritual life, unfettered and unclogged by sin or sense?"

It did not seem strange that Cyril was sitting there by his side, discoursing in the old bright way, with the old familiar kindliness and something more than the old radiance of youth in the blue eyes, whose light was blended confusingly with that of the broad heaven above, whence the clouds were rapidly sweeping. Cyril spoke of the broken Sèvres vase, laughing at the childish terrors of that bygone transgression. "You got the blame, old fellow, and the punishment, but I got the suffering," he said. "Yes," he added, in the thoughtfulness that was wont to descend upon the twins in their lightest moments; "the sorrow of sorrows is sin."

Then Cyril seemed to fade, and only Lilian remained, unseen, supporting him till he lost all consciousness.

"It is a case of want and exposure," said the doctor, bending over the lifeless form beneath the tree, and applying brandy to

the closed lips. "Stand back, if you please. I wonder that you picnickers let the man lie alone here all these hours!"

"We thought he was drunk," replied a young man, with an air of compunction. "We passed him at noon, and did not pass again till five, when he seemed to be asleep. Tramps so often sleep half the day."

"And Smith saw him at nine, and he was begging in the village yesterday, and must have lain here all last night, and it is eight o'clock now. What do you think of that, inspector?"

"I think," replied the police inspector, who had chanced to be driving by in his dog-cart, with a couple of stout constables, just after the village doctor's arrival, "that this is the very chap we've been wanting this three weeks. There will be a gunshot-wound in the leg. A gentleman of your profession, doctor, if this is my man. Not dead, is he? What, more brandy? and not a sign of life yet."

"Nothing in the pockets but this," said a constable, showing the empty comfit-box, the handkerchief marked "M. L. M.," and the piece of bread given on the Sunday. "Ah! and his name is Stone, and he's been after letters at Hawkburne this three weeks, has he, sir? And begged at the Rectory, did he?"

"We had our eye on that post-office, but never chanced to light on the man," added the inspector. "Quick with those blankets, there! Here, doctor, isn't this a gunshot-wound? He'll be all right at the station-house. He can go in a cart, I suppose? Our own surgeon will look to him there. If you don't mind the trouble of going with him, doctor, nobody will hinder you. Do you think he'll die on the way?"

A week or two later, there was a cheerful family group in Canon Maitland's drawing-room, the windows of which stood wide to a small lawn sloping down to a stream, beyond which lay the little country town, half veiled in light smoke-mist. His twin-sister was there, with children playing at her knee, and his pretty wife sat at a tea-table and talked to him on various homely themes.

"And why do you think, Marion," asked Lilian, after a thoughtful pause, during which she had not been listening to them, "that the man who held your pony at Burnham was the escaped convict?"

"Lilian," interposed the canon, quickly, "how often have I begged you to spare me these topics? You know I cannot hear that word without pain."

"Perhaps," said Lilian, "I should hear the word with less pain myself, if I did not know that Henry was at Portsmouth."

Cyril's face blanched, and he was about to reply, when the door burst open, and Keppel Everard rushed in.

"By George, Marion!" he cried, "that runaway convict whose adventures we were reading yesterday, turns out to be that poor devil Henry!"

"I knew it!" cried Marion, passionately. "Oh, Lilian, I might have saved him, and I did not! He was so like him, but so worn and old. Oh, Lilian, his eyes when he looked at the children! And Amy saw the likeness to Leslie. How little she guessed!"

"How do you know this, Keppel?" asked Cyril, in his deepest tones, while Marion sobbed convulsively, and Lilian, marble pale, clasped the child which was leaning upon her more tightly, and listened.

"The governor of the prison told my father. Henry was at death's door from exhaustion and hardship. He wanted instructions about burying him, but the poor fellow got better, unluckily —for all parties."

"For Heaven's sake, calm yourself, Marion!" said Cyril, who was himself trembling exceedingly. "The children are frightened. By the way, Lilian, I never gave you the letter Lennie brought this morning. It got mislaid somehow among Winnie's, and ought to have been delivered weeks ago."

Lilian took the letter with an abstracted air, and was about to put it in her pocket, when the post-mark, Hawkburne, caught her eye, and a closer examination showed her that the handwriting, distorted and irregular as a wounded hand had made it, yet faintly resembled Henry's. She tore it open, read it, and fainted for the first and last time in her life.

PART III.

"I charge thee, fling away ambition:
By that sin fell the angels; how can man then,
The image of his Maker, hope to win by 't?
Love thyself last: cherish those hearts that hate thee."

CHAPTER I.

One bright summer morning in the year 1881, a man was travelling through the heart of Devonshire to Exeter in a first-class carriage, the only other occupant of which was a comfortable-looking clergyman, who was evidently able to digest the Thirty-nine Articles and a good daily dinner with equal facility, and whose parish, no doubt, showed a happy sterility of evil-livers and dissenters, with an equally happy fertility of tithes. This clergyman's kindly, fresh-complexioned face assumed an expression of singular concern and perplexity whenever he looked, as he did furtively from time to time under cover of his newspaper, at his fellow-traveller. The latter was a gaunt, haggard man, with a worn and wasted face, which was partially covered by a beard, the even and sharply cut ends of which showed that it had only recently been allowed to grow, and was lighted by dark, deeply sunken eyes of a kindly but singularly wistful expression; the beard as well as the hair was grizzled.

The man looked about fifty or five and fifty; his shoulders were bent, and he walked with a stiff and laboured gait. His manner was shy and uneasy; he wore gloves, which he never removed; and his dress consisted of a badly made and ill-fitting suit of grey. The clergyman recognized this suit of grey as that which is supplied to discharged prisoners and soldiers.

It was scarcely possible to recognize in this bowed and broken man in the ill-fitting grey suit, the handsome, light-hearted young fellow who travelled down to Oldport with another clergyman only eighteen years before, full of health and hope and intellect, and talking gaily of all things in heaven and earth. And yet, if you looked carefully at him, there was the same direct and clear gaze in the candid brown eyes, the same sweetness about the lips, the same look of moral strength in the whole face.

But there was no longer the air of intellectual power or the confident calm of a man whose fate is in his own hands, and who means to mould it to noble purposes. Eighteen years of intense suffering, heroically endured, had marked the face with an unspeakable nobility and gentleness—an expression which deeply

impressed and mystified the clergyman opposite him, who knew perfectly that the owner of this sublime face must have left Dartmoor but an hour or two before.

Yes; Everard was free at last. The day for which he had sighed through all that furnace of long years had actually dawned. He might come and go beneath the broad heaven above England as he listed. The fever of this thought had kept him awake through the long hours of the last night in prison; and yet, when he turned his back on the grim buildings of Dartmoor, he could scarcely see them for tears.

He left friends behind those stern walls—friends who would feel his departure as an irreparable loss, friends for whom his heart bled. In the wide world into which he was thrust alone, after a lifetime spent in unlearning its ways, he had but one friend; one who had seen him last in the flower of youth and intellect, and who, in spite of her long-tried and unswerving devotion, might shrink from the wreck he now was, ruined in health, shattered in nerves, and with blasted prospects.

These thoughts made him turn a wistful gaze upon the purple slopes of Dartmoor whenever a turn of the line brought it into sight. The rapture he had felt in freedom on his temporary escape, nine years before, could never more throb so strongly within him. Those later years had wrought more cruel effect upon him; the privations of that brief spell of freedom — which, nevertheless, was in his memory like the very breath of heaven— and the illness which followed them had more surely sapped his strength. His captivity had been more rigorous after that; he had worn irons. The routine had now more effectually numbed his faculties, so that at last it had grown to be a necessity; and now that he found himself thrown on his own resources, and dependent on no will but his own, he was like a lost child, half frightened and bewildered by the pettiest responsibilities of life.

He dared not encourage the good clergyman's kindly attempts at general conversation, and the paper he lent him was as if written in an unknown tongue. Who could understand the *Times* of to-day, if the events of the last twenty years were a blank to him? Empires had disappeared from Europe since Everard's incarceration; fresh empires had risen; English society and English public opinion had undergone a total change; English politics had been radically altered; more than one revolution had been accomplished; old landmarks were swept away; the world had made mighty strides onwards, for better or for worse; and of all this he knew nothing.

At Exeter he felt more at ease. Leaving the station on foot,

he went into the streets of the ancient city, not heeding the cries of cabmen and hotel touts, not dreaming that he could be addressed as "Sir," who had so long been only No. 62, and pleasantly excited to find himself moving unhindered among crowds of free fellow-creatures. The cathedral bells were pealing merrily for some festival; soldiers were marching with bright music through the streets, which were thronged with women and children in light summer dresses. How beautiful they all looked, after the ghastly figures of the convicts in their hideous garb of uniform shame! and how delicious was the free air and sense of motion at will!

He entered the first tailor's shop, and got a suit of ready-made clothes, which he put on there and then, not unmindful of a curious smile on the shopman's features at sight of the grey suit. Here also he purchased a suitable outfit for a weeks; then he got a portmanteau, and, feeling a different being in a dark and well-made suit, he got himself some boots at a fashionable boot-maker's; and then went to some dining-rooms and ate his first free meal with rising spirits, and was no longer startled when the waiter addressed him respectfully, and waited on his behests with "Yes, sir" and "No, sir."

When he returned to the station and took his seat in a third-class carriage to London, he looked what he was, a gentleman, save for his hands, which he kept carefully gloved. He had many travelling companions now, having chosen to go first-class in the grey suit in the hope of being alone and unnoticed, and to the conversation of these he listened with a kind of awe; for none of them were criminals—all were free, and they spoke of things and moved in a life of which he had been long ignorant.

He had purchased some periodicals with a strange joy in the novelty and freedom of the act, but he could not bring his attention to bear upon them; his mind was too full. He could not even listen to the conversation of his fellow-travellers, which had at first such a strange interest for him.

He gazed out upon the swift-rolling summer landscape, and rejoiced in the roses which starred the passing gardens in June luxury, and wondered if it were really he. His captivity was turned, and he was indeed like unto them that dream. It was so sweet, and yet so terribly sad. Not only were youth and strength and hope gone, but the very world from which he had been so suddenly torn was almost swept away. Leslie was dead, and Marion and Mrs. Maitland and his father, the stout old admiral, and they had never known that he was innocent. Did they know now, he wondered, and could they bear the thought of the other's

guilt, or were all things earthly to them as if they had never been? And of those who remained, how much of the old selves he remembered still lived? The long years had had no power to touch Lilian's loyalty, but what had they done to herself?

The train rushed clattering into a large station and stopped. Some of his fellow-travellers got out, disinterring their buried parcels and wraps with cheerful bustle. A young lady begged his pardon for incommoding him—how strange the slight courtesy seemed!—others wished him good morning, and he returned the salutation with a dim feeling of transgression; he could not yet realize that he might speak without leave.

A girl with a sad face offered roses at the windows, and brightened when he bought some. He had touched no flowers since he gave those to Lilian on the fatal New Year's Eve. Those were virgin-white, which should have been red with blood; these were warm crimson and gold.

It was dark night when they reached London. Everard scarcely knew what to do in the tumult and din of a great metropolitan station. At last he found himself and his brand-new portmanteau in a hansom, driving towards a hotel he mentioned, half afraid it might have disappeared from the face of the earth.

At the time of his conviction the law which forfeited the property of felons was still in force, so that he would have been penniless had not the admiral left him an equal share with his other children at his death, which occurred some five years back. This little property—which was, of course, in the hands of trustees—had been accumulating during those years, and would now afford him a moderate income, which he still hoped to increase by the exercise of his profession. He was to see the late admiral's man of business on the morrow, and when that was done he scarcely knew where to turn.

He could not go to Lilian with the prison taint still upon him; the thought of that was unendurable. She did not know the exact date at which he was to be set at liberty, so he decided to spend a week or two in getting accustomed to a free life, in ridding himself of some of his enormous ignorance of everyday affairs, and in purging his memory of prison degradations. Then he had messages to deliver to the friends of his fellow-prisoners, and set about that at once.

London oppressed him with its immensity and tumult and the awful sense of loneliness which it produced; so after a few days he went into the country, resolving to stop wherever fancy prompted. During those few days he had looked into much new literature, with an appalling sense of being left far behind his age.

The medical and scientific journals gave him the keenest stab; science had made such mighty strides without his aid, and the theory, the darling theory which was to effect a revolution in medical science, had already been formed by another and accepted by the world.

Perhaps country air would restore his shattered nerves. There is no nurse or healer like Nature; to her kind arms he would flee for refuge. But along that very line he had travelled down to Malbourne with Cyril nearly twenty years ago, and the memory of it tore his heart. "An ascetic is a rake turned monk," he had told Cyril, little dreaming what a home-thrust he was giving. And here was the massive cathedral, and here the towers of Belminster, a place associated with scenes so agonizing. Yet he remembered his jest to Cyril about the bishop.

He got out at Belminster, attracted by the strange fascination which belongs to scenes of past suffering, and, leaving his things at the station, strolled leisurely down the steep street, and looked with infinite compassion at the gaol in which he had endured such agony. The place was not altered; people might have been strolling about just the same while his torture was going on.

There was the lovely old Gothic cross, standing a solitary relic of dead centuries, and wondering silently at the feverish present; there were the old houses, jutting out upon pillars over the street and hiding the dark shops; there, finally, was the hoary cathedral, girdled about by its lofty trees and its green, quiet close, into which he strolled with a feeling of sweet refreshment. His eyes rested lovingly on the pleasant scene, so full of old-world associations, so suggestive of all things soothing and sweet; a place in which one must think of past things and of things eternal, and yet which is linked so harmoniously with things passing and the little life of to-day.

He strolled into the grey, vast, echoing interior, and, sitting down opposite the open door, lost himself in a pleasant dream. How sweet it would be to live there under the great minster's shadow, within sound of the holy bell; to lead a gentle, holy, uneventful life, pacing daily that rich green turf, looking on those great trees and red-roofed houses, and on the pillared cloister yonder, and on the light-springing arches of the Deanery, as one passed to and fro, lowly, perhaps, but calm and happy! Something light fluttered between the slender black pillars of the Deanery entrance. It was a young lady in a gay summer dress, who passed out and walked along by the old cloister with an indescribable grace in the carriage of her slim figure.

The sight of her youth and beauty called up pleasant visions of sweet and tranquil home life—life rich with love and duty, and adorned with culture and refinement; and a little sigh escaped him in spite of himself, when he thought of the possibilities of life, and remembered what he had missed in his long agony. People began to stream in slowly by twos and threes, and he observed that the bells were chiming languidly; visitors with guide-books went out or moved choirwards; a dark, thin young clergyman, with a rapt face and ascetic lips, ascended the choir-steps, and recalled the Cyril of twenty years ago with strange vividness; the great organ began to boom; the choristers paced slowly in, heavenly boy faces showing above their white robes, or men with worn and rugged faces; the bright silk hoods of the clergy gleamed as they passed; evensong began.

Everard did not dream of entering the choir; the thought of mingling with others on equal terms even in an act of worship was as yet far from him. He felt himself a dweller on the outskirts of humanity; it was as yet a great boon to be allowed merely to look on without rebuke. So the solemn words and heavenly music came echoing beneath the dim arches brokenly to his far-off ears, and their peaceful spell drew him gradually nearer to the choir.

At last the anthem began, and his soul melted within him beneath the passion of the full-voiced strain, and he stole silently up the matted steps with bowed head, his consciousness merged in the meaning which the mellow voices strove with conflicting endeavour to make clear. The glorious tumult increased till it dissolved in a triumph of harmony; and then above it, like a lonely sea-bird soaring over a sea of stormy, foam-tipped billows, there rose a single boy's voice, so sweet and pure, so full of unconscious and unutterable pathos, that Everard trembled as he heard it, and stole on to the very gates of the sanctuary to listen. Higher and higher the solitary boy-voice rose, till it seemed as if it must be finally lost in some clear heaven of ineffable sweetness; there it hovered and paused, and then descended, rising and falling again upon the pinions of strong melody, till it fell at length half wearied into the sea of deep and mellow harmony.

The listener outside the sanctuary gate gazed in in a tumult of unspeakable feeling, not knowing what memories and hopes and longings the boy's beautiful voice awakened within him, but vaguely conscious that he had stood thus before in some far-off forgotten time, seeing all his lost youth flash by him, and realizing the spell of Lilian's long-missed presence once more.

The anthem died away, and Everard came to himself, and thought how unfitted he was for life with a nervous system so sensitive, so liable to escape control, and he remembered the scorn which once mingled with his pity for such weaklings. He scorned no man now.

The chorister with the beautiful voice had a face of equal charm—a face from which Everard could scarcely avert his eyes. The other boys looked roguish enough, though they were very well behaved—pattern choristers, indeed; but this lad's face and demeanour had a singular pathos, and his eyes, instead of being bent, as the others were, on the desk, had a forward or upward gaze during his singing. He evidently knew all his music by heart.

When the service was over, and the worshippers had left the building, Everard strolled down the nave, looking at different monuments, and spoke to the verger, whose offer to guide him he had refused.

"I know the cathedral well," he said, "but I have not seen it for many years."

"You may have travelled and seen a sight of cathedrals since, but you won't see many to beat Belminster," said the verger, proudly.

"Not many; and it is in better order than in former times. And what a very well-behaved choir! I suppose your dean is a good man."

"Yes, sir; the dean is very particular about the cathedral. He takes an interest in every creature about it, too. We all have to mind our *p*'s and *q*'s, I assure you, and we'd do anything for him. He's that taking in his ways, to be sure."

"And who is your dean?" asked Everard, indifferently, as he was turning away.

"Bless my soul alive!" exclaimed the verger; "don't you know who the Dean of Belminster is? Excuse me, sir, but where *have* you been not to have heard of Dean Maitland?"

Everard was glad he had turned away, and he did not reply for a moment.

"No doubt I appear very ignorant," he said at length, with a little smile, "but I have not been near Belminster for this twenty years."

"But not to know Dean Maitland! Why, all the world knows the great dean. The books he has written, the things he's done! Nothing can be done without Dean Maitland. He's the greatest preacher in the Church of England. They're going to make him Bishop of Warham soon. Why, bless you, sir, when Dean Mait-

land preaches in Westminster Abbey, extra police have to be put on, and people wait outside for hours. To think you never heard of Dean Maitland!" and the verger looked up and down Everard, scanning him as if he were some strange natural phenomenon.

"The greatest preacher?" repeated Everard, his heart throbbing painfully. "What is his Christian name?"

"*The* greatest, and the bishop, Bishop Oliver, the Bishop of Belminster, is the next, and some think he runs the dean close," replied the verger, with satisfaction; "Christian name, Cyril. You should hear him preach, sir, you should indeed. People come down to Belminster on purpose. He preaches to-morrow in the nave. A series of evening lectures to working-men, and the dean takes his turn to-morrow."

"I will come," said Everard; and he moved away, and stood gazing abstractedly at the ancient font, consumed with the strangest excitement.

"It is very old, sir," said a sweet voice behind him; and, turning, he found himself face to face with the chorister who sang the solo.

He was a slight, delicate lad, some ten years of age, with dark hair waved over his pure white brow, and beautiful blue eyes gazing with a strange pathos from the well-featured face; and the singular beauty of his voice was enhanced by the purity of his accent, which was that of a gentleman.

"Old indeed," returned Everard. "Old Oliver couldn't batter that; it is too solid."

"You know, of course, that he smashed the west window," said the lad, pointing to the great window, with its singular pattern, formed by piecing the broken fragments of richly coloured glass together.

Everard replied in the affirmative, and moved on, the boy accompanying him, and discussing the different objects of interest with singular intelligence.

"You do not tire of the cathedral, though you sing in it daily?" asked Everard.

"No, I never tire of it," he replied, gazing dreamily round; "it is such a beautiful place. I love the vastness of it. I spend hours here; it is my home."

He had insensibly stolen his small hand into Everard's, who was thrilled deeply by the warm, soft grasp, and he now led him on to show him an ancient tomb.

"Have you been a chorister long?" Everard asked.

"Only since we came to Belminster, three years ago; then I was the smallest boy in the choir." He did not go to school, he

said, in reply to a query; he had a tutor. "My name is Maitland," he added; "Everard Maitland."

Everard's hand tightened convulsively over the child's slight fingers, and he gazed searchingly in his face, which betrayed no surprise at the intent gaze.

"Ah! the dean's son," he said, after a long pause.

"Yes," he replied, with a proud little air; "the dean's son. Do you know my father? Have you heard him preach?"

"Not of late."

"He is a very good father," said the boy; "and I am his only son. People think him great, but he is better than great; he is good. We have no mother. What time is it?" he added, as Everard drew out his watch to conceal the tumult that was stirring within him.

Everard silently turned the dial towards him for answer.

"I can hear it tick," said the child, regretfully; "but I cannot see it."

"Not see it!" exclaimed Everard, in surprise.

"No, sir; I am blind. You are surprised?" he added, after a pause; "people always are. I was born blind, and I have been trained to be as independent as possible. I show it more in a strange place. I know every inch of the cathedral, I love it so."

"Blind!" echoed Everard, at last; "and you are his only son?"

"His only son. It is a terrible grief to him. It is little to me; my life is very happy, and my father is so very kind. And they let me sing in the choir and play the organ. Few boys have such pleasures as I."

"You bear your affliction manfully," said Everard, laying his hand tenderly on the child's head and gazing thoughtfully on him for a space. "But how can you enjoy the cathedral if you cannot see its beauty?"

"I can feel it. I have heard its different parts so often described, and I know its history so well. Then I can hear by the echoes how vast it is, and how lofty, and the way in which the music rolls about it describes its shape. I could feel you standing at the font just now, and I know when you are looking at me. I knew that you were a good man the moment you spoke. Your voice is familiar to me. You see, we blind people have other senses to make up, sir."

The child smiled as he said this, a smile that touched Everard to his heart's core. Cyril and Lilian smiled thus, but the child's smile had a sweetness beyond theirs, one which is only born of suffering.

They had now reached the open door, through which entered the reflected warmth of the sunshine, which the blind boy said he could feel, and here they parted.

"Good-bye, sir," said the boy, pressing his hand, and directing upon him the strange unaware gaze of the blind. "We have had a charming talk," he added, in Cyril's own fascinating manner.

"Good-bye, dear little fellow, and God bless you," replied Everard, returning the pressure of the delicate hand. "Stay," he added, as the child stepped out into the sunshine. "Had you not a brother named Ernest?"

"Oh yes," he answered; "they say he was such a strong healthy boy. He died when I was a baby. My poor father has lost many sons and daughters, and I can never be anything but a care to him. He has only my sister to comfort him. Good-bye, sir; I shall be late;" and, taking off his hat once more, he sprang down the steps and across the pavement, to an iron railing which here fenced the turf. Everard watched him as he vaulted it easily, and dashed, as seeing boys dash, headlong across the green, making a slight turn to avoid a collision with a solemn clergyman, who lifted his hat to him, and then flying straight under the slender arches of the Deanery entrance, where he vanished from sight.

"Poor young gentleman!" said the verger, who was standing behind Everard, chinking a shilling the child had given him. "Nothing pleases him so much as showing the cathedral to strangers, and keeping his blindness from them. Many and many a one he's took in. But he always gives a verger a shilling after taking a party round; he wouldn't take a man's bread out of his mouth. It's a sore trial to the dean, sir, you may depend upon it. It was trouble to his mother caused it, they say. Just before he was born she went through a deal in her mind, and was never the same again. And that affected the boy's nerves, specially the optic nerves, and he was born blind. Pity, isn't it? We shall miss Master Everard when the dean is Bishop of Warham."

"No doubt," said Everard, moving abstractedly away, his eyes rivetted on the Deanery; "no doubt."

Lilian had gradually ceased to mention Cyril in her letters; indeed, since Marion's death, she had not mentioned him at all, and Everard had never during the whole of his imprisonment named the name of the man he had so loved, and for whom he had suffered so cruelly. And now he found him the great Dean Maitland, too great to be merely the Dean of Belminster; he belonged apparently to the higher order of deans, like Dean Swift and Dean Stanley, and was, moreover, Bishop-elect of Warham.

And Warham was the greatest see in England; its bishops had ranked as princes in olden days. There was but one greater dignity in the Church—that of archbishop. Everard paused opposite the Deanery, and looked long upon it, while a singular conflict of feelings raged within him.

On this very spot, eighteen years ago, Cyril himself had stood, an obscure curate, while Everard was undergoing his terrible ordeal before the judge, and had reflected, in spite of the tumult within him, upon the advantages of being a dean.

He had looked with keen outward observation, as Everard was looking now, on the majestic pile of the grey cathedral, rising above the sedate red roofs and gables of the quiet and dignified close; on the same elms and limes, leafless then in the March sunshine, and had heard the rooks cawing in their lofty circles overhead, with the same suggestions of boyhood and home and the breezy downs about Malbourne;—there he had stood, though Everard did not know it, and fought an inward battle in which his soul's best powers were overthrown.

Some such battle raged within Everard now. He thought of his long agony, and the crimes which caused it; he thought of his heart's best friendship, and the treachery which betrayed it; he repeated to himself with various intonations of scorn and indignation, "Dean Maitland, Bishop of Warham;" he thought of the guileless child with his angel voice and his lifelong affliction; he thought of his own broken health and ruined life; he thought of Lilian wasting her youth in loneliness, and asked himself how he could forgive the traitor for whose crime he had suffered—the traitor who dressed in fine linen and dwelt in palaces among the greatest in the land, while the betrayed wore his heart out in a prison, clothed in the garb of shame, and herded with the scum and off-scouring of vice. He could not bear these distracting thoughts; he turned with a gesture of fierce indignation, and, striding hurriedly along the close, passed beneath the Gothic gateway, in whose angle was niched a tiny church, passed along amid a crowd of happy schoolboys in front of the college, and did not breathe freely till he found himself once more in the bustling High Street.

CHAPTER II.

THE Deanery drawing-room looked out upon a soft stretch of lawn, partly shaded by some magnificent trees, and bounded by a delicious old garden with warm red walls, on which fruit was ripening in the July sun. The mullioned casements, with their diamond panes, stood open to let in the sunny air laden with the scent of carnations, roses, and mignonette. All that refined taste backed by a long purse could do towards making a room beautiful and suggestive of art and culture, as well as perfectly comfortable, had been done to this room, which, as everybody knew, had been arranged by the dean and his twin sister. Nor did the apartment lack the crowning grace of a charming mistress; the dean's only daughter, a girl of fifteen or sixteen, but apparently much older.

She sat, becomingly dressed in some light, fresh material, near an open casement by a low table, on which a tea-service was placed, and was talking in the liquid Maitland voice to several ladies and three young and seemingly unmarried men, two of whom were clergymen, while the third, the evident object of the black-coats' dislike, which he as evidently returned, had something about him which proclaimed the dashing hussar. He answered to the name of Lord Arthur.

"Benson," said Miss Maitland, addressing a servant, "tell the dean that I insist upon his coming in to tea. Say who are here. It would serve him right, Lady Louisa," she added, "if I got you to go and rout him out of his den."

"My dear child, the mere suggestion terrifies me!" returned the lady. "Imagine the audacity of rushing in upon the dean, when he might be making one of his lovely sermons or his clever books!"

"By the way," interposed one of the curates, "what an appreciative notice there is in this week's *Guardian* of the dean's 'Epistle to the Romans'! Did you see it, Miss Maitland?"

"Oh, you don't mean to say he is as clever as all that, to make a new Epistle to the Romans!" exclaimed a very young lady, whose simplicity was greatly admired.

The door now opened, and the dean appeared among his guests, making each feel that he or she was the special object of his welcoming words and smiles. After this greeting, his glance ran anxiously round the room and across the garden in search of something that he missed. "Where is Everard?" he then asked.

"Probably in the cathedral," replied Marion. "He has not returned from evensong."

"You were not at evensong, Mr. Dean," said a lady. "It is a pity, for Everard excelled himself in the anthem."

"He did indeed," chimed in the young curate with the rapt face. "I never heard anything truer or sweeter than that high C of his."

"Poor dear child! his voice is a great consolation to him," sighed the dean, toying comfortably with his teaspoon.

"I wonder if that voice will last?" asked Lord Arthur. "Of course I mean, will it change into a good man's voice?"

"Probably, with health and good management. So many good boy-trebles are strained by overwork, and crack hopelessly at the change," replied the father.

"Now, Lady Louisa, begin your siege," said the young hostess. "If you don't do everything she asks you, papa, you will get no more tea, remember."

"This is alarming," smiled the dean. "Lady Louisa, I appeal to your generosity not to exact too much from a helpless victim."

"Pile on the agony, Aunt Louisa," cried Lord Arthur. "'Væ victis!' remember."

"Your nephew's war-cry. The ruthless soldier flings his sword into the scale," said the dean.

"Yes, and I'd fling myself after it, if you would only come to Dewhurst next week," added the hussar. "You've never seen the old place, dean, and my father is dying to have you there, and so is my mother."

"And your aunt," added Lady Louisa, laughing; "not to mention yourself." And she proffered her request, in the form of an invitation from her sister-in-law to the dean and his daughter to dine and sleep at the ancient historic ducal castle one day in the following week.

"There, papa," said Marion, with pretty imperiousness; "all you have to do is to name the day."

"Alas!" sighed her father, "next week is quite filled up."

"Oh, but you must come next week," urged Lady Louisa. "We shall be alone then, and able to enjoy you. Indeed, the duchess will never forgive you if you do not come."

"To incur the duchess's displeasure grieves me to the heart," replied the dean.

"Also mine," added the lady, whom some people held to be well disposed to wed the widowed ecclesiastic. She was about five and thirty and of majestic presence, if not surprisingly well favoured.

"That," he returned, "would reduce me to absolute despair, yet I am firm. I am tied to the stake."

It was while the dean was being thus implored, coaxed, and threatened, and while one or two people who would have been ready to depart this life in peace after an invitation to the great duke's show-place were listening with unspeakable envy, that a servant stole up to the dean and appeared anxious to attract his attention.

"Well, Benson?" he said at length, having disposed of the question of the visit.

"A young gentleman, sir," said the man, in a low tone—"refuses to give his name; says it is private business of importance."

"Why did you not say I was engaged?"

"I did, sir. He said his business was urgent."

"Let him wait in the library."

"I wonder how they make bishops, Mr. Dean?" asked Lady Louisa, mischievously. "Do they send messengers post-haste to offer mitres upon their knees just when people are having tea comfortably?"

The dean smiled a pleased smile, and observed that he had hitherto had no experience of being made a bishop; and a lady present remarked that a certain paper had mentioned his acceptance of the see of Warham as a fact, and further ventured to ask if the journal in question was right.

The dean smiled again. "A man who declines such an office when duly chosen by the rightful authorities incurs a tremendous responsibility," he said, with unusual gravity; and the rumour immediately went forth that he had accepted.

He then withdrew with an apology. "Perhaps we had better not keep the mitre waiting too long, Lady Louisa," he observed to that lady, with his peculiar smile, as he went out.

He reflected, as he left the room, that he might do worse than marry Lady Louisa; also that Lord Arthur, who, though a younger son, was rich enough to marry as he pleased, undoubtedly meant business with regard to Marion. Lady Louisa was amiable, accomplished, not dowerless, pleasing, and of a suitable age. What could a man want more? The Bishop of Warham and Lady Louisa Maitland sounded well. And yet the Bishop of Warham, leading a life of widowed loneliness because his conscience put the narrowest meaning on the phrase "husband of one wife," might have more power over men's minds. But then Dean Maitland belonged to that class of men to whom single blessedness is a curse, and his six years' wifelessness had weighed sorely upon him, and he had but two children, one hopelessly afflicted.

Reaching his study, he rang the bell. "Where is Mr. Obermann?" he asked of the servant, meaning his son's tutor.

"Out, sir."

"And Miss Mackenzie?"—Marion's governess and companion.

"Out, sir. Her Girls' Friendly Meeting day."

"Which that young rascal, Arthur, well knew," thought the dean. Then he ordered that a maid should search the cathedral and close for the blind boy, keeping him in sight, but not accosting him, unless he should break his bounds, which were the cathedral precincts, so careful was the dean of his only son. "Show the young man in here, Benson," he said, in conclusion.

It never struck any visitor, much less this unsophisticated youth, that the dean's easy pose in his library chair by his writing-table, which was so placed that the light from the lattice fell sideways from behind him, leaving him in the complete shadow of the rather dark wainscotted room, yet fully illuminating his books and papers and the chair fronting him, in which he motioned his unknown guest to take a seat, was a calculated one; but it certainly had uncommon advantages, since not a quiver of the penitent's lip, not a line of his face or a movement of his body was lost, while the priest's countenance was but dimly seen in the shade.

Since the production of his popular devotional work, "The Secret Penitent," Dean Maitland's ghostly counsel had been sought by men and women from far and near, chiefly from far, and chiefly, though the gentle reader will probably doubt this assertion, by men. These men were desirous of remaining unknown, and sometimes gave names which they said were assumed, sometimes none at all.

Very strange tales had been told in that pleasant little study, in the sight of that finely carved ebony and ivory crucifix and those beautiful proof engravings of celebrated religious pictures, holy families, ascensions, conspicuously among them a copy of the Gethsemane which hung in the study at Malbourne. Cyrii imagined that the nameless youth was another of these penitents, and received him with a certain tenderness in his stately manner, which he knew was well calculated to unlock the sealed recesses of the heart.

It was a tall, handsome, well-built youth, whose features and expression kindled a vague disquiet in the dean's breast, such an irrational mental discomfort as imaginative people experience at times, and instinctively fear to analyze.

He entered the room with a confident step and bearing, looking boldly forwards with an almost arrogant self-assertion in his gaze, which was quickly subdued by the dignified courtesy of

Dean Maitland—a man with whom, despite his unvarying politeness, which was almost courtliness, no man ever dared take a liberty. It seemed as if the youth, entering with his bristles all on end, had expected hostility or at least repression, and, receiving a suave cordiality instead, was for the moment confounded. He felt himself enveloped in a blue radiance from the dean's strangely beautiful and powerful eyes, which searched him, measured him, explored him to his remotest recesses, and reduced all his pretensions to nothing.

A man sitting at a table with the implements of his daily occupation before him has a great advantage over one who sits unoccupied in a chair in the full light, for the express purpose of talking. This the dean knew, and he never committed the error of walking into a room to begin an interview with a person he intended to influence, though no man knew better than he how to walk into a room.

Sitting at ease in his wooden chair, with the open lattice, picturesquely tangled with invading roses and ivy, behind him; with his melodious voice and refined accent, new to his listener's ears; with his graceful limbs showing to advantage in his black dress with shorts and gaiters; and with his well-formed hands in harmony with his severely cut features, which, however, were only dimly seen, he cast a spell over his visitor;—he suggested, further, that harmonious blending of aristocratic piety which is peculiar to the English dean, and perhaps to the French abbé before the Revolution, and which had so fascinated his own youthful gaze. He made a picture in the oak wainscotted room, with its latticed casements, ecclesiastic adornments and suggestions of honoured antiquity, which quite overpowered the unaccustomed gaze of the younger man, who never forgot it.

The dean's practised eye soon saw that his visitor was not a gentleman, though near being one. He was ill dressed in a badly made light suit, which hung loosely upon him, and yet became him. A crimson scarf was fastened carelessly about his neck by a flashing pin, and that also well became his dark and handsome features. His strong hands were brown and large, but well-formed. He used his straw hat to emphasize what he said. He was full-grown, but so young that his face was smooth, save for the slight indication of a moustache. "He is quite honest," the dean thought.

"I come from America," he began abruptly, in a mellow and powerful voice.

"You come from a country of which a man may be proud," replied the dean, in the tone which made men love him; "and you kindly honour me with a visit?"

"In plain words, sir, what do I want!" broke in the youth. "I want to be a gentleman."

"A most laudable ambition," returned the other, smiling.

"I want to go to Oxford or Cambridge. Cambridge I would prefer, because you were there."

He acknowledged this compliment with a slight bow.

"My father was a gentleman," continued the lad, in his jerky and headlong fashion; "but my mother was not."

"A man's mother," returned the dean, in his plaintive voice, "is more usually a lady."

"Oh, you are laughing at me! But I am English-born, and was brought up a British subject in the Dominion. My name," he continued, with some agitation, "is Benjamin Lee."

He looked earnestly at the face in the shadowed corner, but he did not see the sudden and quickly subdued quiver of the dean's lip. He was aware, however, that a change had taken place in his face and demeanour.

"A very good name," he returned, in the same dulcet tones; "a very usual English name."

"I was born at Malbourne," the young man went on, with an increased sonorousness of voice and intensity of gaze. "My mother's name was Alma Lee."

"Indeed. I remember your mother well. Is she living still?"

"She is, and I bring a letter from her. But that is not what I want to say. My mother was a deeply wronged woman, and she never complained. The business, Dean Maitland, is just this: My father has done nothing for me; all has fallen upon my mother. She has had me well educated for her means, and wanted me to go into business. But I am ambitious; I wish to make a figure in the world—to be, as I said, a gentleman, for I feel the good blood in my veins, and I am determined to have my right, and to claim from my father what he is well able to give me—a university education and a start in life."

"Indeed!" said the dean, in an icy tone.

"And therefore," proceeded the youth, springing to his feet the more to emphasize his words, "I come to you, because I am your *son!*"

The word "son" he delivered as if dealing a blow, and he evidently expected his hearer to recoil beneath this tremendous assertion; but he was disappointed.

The dean's fine-cut features indeed grew pale in the dusk, and there was a sudden deepening of tint in his eyes; his lips also met with a stern compression. But of this the young man saw nothing, and no other sign of emotion betrayed the tumult that

raged so madly within him at the sound of that deadly monosyllable.

"Calm yourself, my friend; pray be seated again," he said, in cool and silvery tones. "Since when, may I ask, have you suffered from this distressing delusion?"

It was now the younger man's turn to be aghast. The coolness with which this startling assertion was received utterly confounded him, and he dropped, with a vacuous stare, into his seat, muttering some queer Yankee objurgation.

"Delusion!" he ejaculated at length.

"It is a very usual form of mental disease to imagine one's self the son of some eminent person," observed the dean, in the indifferent tone of one uttering a mild platitude. "Are you at present under medical treatment?"

"No, *sir*," returned the lad, regaining his mental poise; "I am as sound in mind and body as a man can possibly be; and I know myself to be your son, and I am here to claim my rights as such."

"The facts of your birth are well known in Malbourne," continued the dean, in the same indifferent tone. "They are such as reverence for parents—a virtue, I fear, not inculcated in your adopted country—should lead you to conceal, and, if possible, forget. I remember the circumstances fully. I baptized you myself—that is, if you are the person you claim to be."

"I am not surprised that you should disown me before the world," said the youth; "and I own that it is impossible to speak upon the subject without some irreverence unbecoming a son; but I bid you ask your conscience, sir, whose fault it is that I cannot refer to my birth without imputing blame to my parents? I bid you further ask your conscience how you are to answer at the bar of Divine Justice, if you add to the sin which brought me into the world, a fatherless outcast, with the instincts of a higher rank warring with the barren necessities of his life, the further sin of neglecting the responsibilities you rashly incurred. Oh, I have no legal rights—that I know well; but have I no natural rights—I who have the blood of an ancient family in my veins, the instincts of a long line of gentlemen? Have I no rights in the sight of Him whose eternal laws were broken by the sin which gave rise to my being, and of which I was entirely innocent?"

It was a strange reversal of parts, the son admonishing the father, the layman rebuking the priest, the supposed penitent accusing the confessor; but the youth's fiery words struck home, and the dean quivered visibly beneath them, and for the moment he could summon no reply to his ashen lips.

"I am sorry to be obliged to distress you, sir," continued the young man, with some compunction, "but you will see on reflection that I ask nothing unreasonable. I merely ask you to repair the wrong of my birth—or rather, to fulfil the obligations incumbent on a parent. I have grown to manhood with no aid or recognition from you. I am alone in the world; for my mother has a mortal disease, and has come home only to die. I simply ask for this start in life, which you must be well able to give; I ask no further recognition. Believe me, sir, the time may come when you will be glad to have some claim on the duty, if not the affection, of a son, and I am not ungrateful."

The dean rose to his feet, quivering. "Silence!" he cried, in deep tones of compelling intensity. "I cannot bear this," he added, in a voice of anguish, which escaped him against his will. "This is intolerable, to be insulted in one's own house! Go, sir, and remember that in this country conduct so outrageous as yours is likely to lead you to imprisonment in a lunatic asylum."

Now that he was standing he seemed to be gradually regaining the mastery of himself, which for the moment he had lost. Young Lee rose, but did not withdraw.

"I go," he replied. "I have said enough for the present, but you will hear of me again until I gain my will. In the mean time, here is the letter my mother bid me deliver into your own hands, and which needs an answer."

The dean took the letter with an inward shudder at the sight of it, and brought out some glasses, which he affected to wipe and arrange before reading it, though in reality he needed no glasses; he only wanted to gain time and composure.

"By the way, Mr. Lee," he observed quietly, "your mother married, I believe, some groom before leaving England. Is he living?"

"She married Charles Judkins, who was a kind stepfather to me. He died some years ago, leaving my mother and myself well provided for."

"Your mother, then, has no other children?"

"None, sir."

The dean had at last arranged the glasses and unfolded the letter, giving one swift glance at his visitor, who had walked up to one of the engravings, a sweet and guileless Madonna with a thoughtful child, and was examining it with interest. Nevertheless, the dean shaded his face from the light as he read.

The room was very still, and pleasant sounds stole in through the open lattice. A great bee was humming about the roses and honeysuckle just outside; a blackbird woke up from his afternoon

drowse and began fluting his liquid vespers; the cathedral clock proclaimed the hour in deep booming notes, and all the bells in the city echoed it with varying cadence; young voices came through the sunny air of the garden, and the stranger saw a party playing at tennis below; a girl's clear laugh rang out in true heart-music, and was followed by a man's. It was Marion laughing at some absurd mistake on the part of the love-blinded Lord Arthur, who was ready to laugh with her. The dean meanwhile read on in silence.

The young man grew impatient, and longed to soothe his soul by a hearty whistle, to which his full red lips rounded themselves. He got to the end of the engravings, and turned once more to the figure at the table; but the dean was still reading, statue-like, with his face accidentally shaded by his hand, though he never turned a page of the brief letter of one sheet. The picture he made sitting thus beneath the lattice, through which some long golden bars of sunshine were now stealing, remained upon the young man's memory for ever, though he did not hear the quick subdued breathing of the reader, or see the chill drops upon his tortured brow.

Within a stone's throw of that lattice one of the canons was standing on a short ladder, tending a peach-tree on his garden wall, thus seeking a pleasant distraction from the abstruse Hebrew studies in which he had been buried all the day. His wife stood in the pathway by the sunny border, where the bees were humming luxuriously over their luscious thieving, and looked on at his labours.

"I had it from the dean myself, Edmund," she was saying, "this very afternoon."

"Well, my dear," he replied, rather indistinctly on account of the strips of cloth he held in his mouth, "you will now have the satisfaction of repeating it all over the close. Bishop of Warham, eh? Maitland is a lucky fellow, and about as ignorant as that cat"—pointing to a fine grimalkin, who was lazily watching his master. "But scholarship goes for nothing in these radical days."

"I am sure he will make a delightful bishop," said the lady; "and who knows what old fogey we may get at the Deanery now? Some old frump, with his nose buried in a book all day, perhaps."

"When not perched on a ladder," laughed the canon. "Well, who wouldn't have the gift of the gab like Maitland? Lucky fellow, to be sure!"

The letter which took so long to read ran as follows:—

"I am come home to die, and I wish to see you once more

first. I promised never to betray you, and swore away an innocent man's character to shield you, and I have never had a happy hour since. I cannot undo all the wrong I have done for your sake, but I can and must clear this man, who never did me harm. I cannot die in peace till I have righted him. Can I do it without hurting you? Come to me for heaven's sake; my days are numbered. My son bears this. He knows his parentage, but nothing more. He is a good lad.

"ALMA JUDKINS."

At last the dean lifted his head and questioned the youth with regard to his mother's illness and present abode, and learned in reply that she was suffering from some fatal internal malady, which had become suddenly worse in consequence of a fall in the Belminster street, and that she had been admitted to the paying ward of the local hospital, whence there was no probability of her issuing alive.

"You take your mother's extremity easily, young man," said the dean.

But the youth replied that he had been expecting the end for so long that it no longer agitated him, yet his eyes filled with tears as he spoke. The dean then took a pen and slowly indited a few sentences, which he gave to the young man, who took the paper and withdrew with a bow, which his host very frigidly returned.

No sooner had the door closed upon the young fellow's stalwart form than Cyril dropped into his chair, and, burying his face in his hands, groaned heavily, shuddering from head to foot. If he could have dreamed this terrible moment twenty years ago, would that handsome stripling ever have seen the light? If any man could be brought face to face with the embodied result of one sin, would he ever sin more? Probably he would, else why has Eternal Wisdom reserved such knowledge for the most part to another world?

A light, swift step sounded along the corridor; the door opened, and the blind boy came running in, with a joyous greeting on his lips.

The dean lifted his head, and strove to calm himself as he welcomed the child in a gentle voice; but his heart was wrung by the contrast between this lad and the fine, healthy youth who had just left him—wrung, too, by the thought that the latter's look had shown no gleam of affection; nothing but a challenging defiance.

"I made such a mistake, papa," said Everard; "I actually took a stranger for you. Yet his voice was louder and his step stronger than yours. I met him in the hall now. Benson was

letting him out. Who was he? Benson says his face is rather like yours, so perhaps I was not so very stupid."

"My poor Everard!" murmured the dean, folding the child with unwonted tenderness in his arms; "my blighted boy!"

"I am not poor," returned the child, brightly, while he laid his round soft cheek on his father's hollow face with a colt-like caress. "Now, dada, I won't be pitied. Benson said the fellow was like you, so his eyes were little better than my ears. But who was he?"

"A stranger, an American. So you sang the solo, I hear?"

"Yes; and it went so well. My voice was like a bird flying up to heaven's gate. Father, it *is* nice to have such a voice; it goes as if it couldn't help it. And I showed such a nice fellow over the cathedral, and took him in thoroughly."

"Poor lad; poor dear lad! And what is going on now?"

"Virgil with the Herr. And after dinner Marry has promised to accompany our violins. And what do you think? The duke has a Stradivarius, and Lord Arthur is to take me to Dewhurst to hear it, and perhaps touch it. How hot and wet your forehead is! Is your head bad? Am I bothering?"

The boy's sightless gaze met his father's glance of passionate tenderness, all unconscious of the agony it looked upon; and the dean turned away, for he could not bear it. Marion's laugh came floating in again with its masculine echo, and the child's face brightened.

"Marry and Arthur," he said.

The dean pushed the dark hair from the boy's brow, kissed and blessed him, and dismissed him under the plea of a headache and desire for quiet, watching him leave the room with a look of wistful compassion. He loved his blind son better than anything on earth, but he remembered how he had held the other lad in his arms at the font, and how the infant's touch had stirred the first keen thrill of fatherhood in his heart.

"I dare not, oh, I dare not! It would be utter ruin!" he murmured to himself, in reply to some inward suggestion.

The young Canadian meantime left the Deanery, and, placing his hat firmly on his head, turned to take one comprehensive look at it before he went round by the cloisters and disappeared.

"Je-*ru*salem!" he exclaimed, "if my sainted parent isn't a first-rate actor and a cool hand! Now I know where I got my brains from."

The dean sat on, with his head buried in his hands and his heart torn, with the deadly missive before him, and utter ruin staring him in the face, while the long golden bars of sunshine

lengthened and fell across him unheeded, and the pleasant chime-music told quarter after quarter.

"Oh, my God!" he groaned, "but one sin in a youth so spotless! And have I not repented? And are all these years of agony nothing? And the work I have done and have still to do! And the powers vouchsafed to me! Is there no mercy—none?"

An hour ago he had been so secure, so unsuspecting—the old ghost laid for ever, he thought. And now? To go to that public hospital, he, to whom no disguise was possible, whose very fame would pursue him and point him out with a finger of fire, to meet the dying gaze of that hated woman, to hear her terrible reproach! How could he? And that boy, with his strong self-will and his ambition—Dean Maitland knew too well whence he got those qualities—he would hunt him down without pity. Why not cut the knot for ever? He had poison at hand.

The low mellow murmurs of a gong rose on his ear (there were no bells or any harsh sounds at the Deanery); he heard Marion's voice calling to Everard, and the tap of her light foot as she ran downstairs, only just in time for dinner. He could not take his life just then; he had to invent an excuse for not appearing at dinner.

The perilous moment past, better thoughts came to him. He leaned out of the window and breathed the cool dusk air. A wakened bird twittered happily before turning again to its rest; Everard's pure voice floated out from an open window, with the words of an anthem he was learning. The dean fell down before the crucifix, and tried to pray. He lay there in the darkness while his children's music sounded through the open windows, till the moonlight stole in through the lattice upon him, and there was silence in the house, save for the ticking of clocks and the deep breathing of sleepers. Then he arose, haggard and exhausted, but resolved to do his duty, whatever it might cost him.

Striking a light, he went to a cabinet inlaid with delicate mosaic, and touched a spring. A hidden compartment was disclosed, whence he took a bottle and a glass on which measures were engraved. Carefully pouring out an exact quantity of dark brown liquid, he drank it and replaced the spring.

The dean was a total abstainer; he knew the world too well to hope for influence over the popular mind unless he bowed to the idol of the hour, and frequently observed to friends that he abstained from wine "for the sake of example." For the same reason, probably, nobody knew anything about the little bottle of dark liquid.

CHAPTER III.

When Everard reached the High Street, his attention was caught by an announcement in a bookseller's window, "Dean Maitland's new work," and, on going up to the shop, he saw the volumes, fresh from the publisher's, in their plain brown binding. It was the third volume of the dean's "Commentary on the Pauline Epistles." There also he saw, in every variety of binding suited to luxurious devotion, his other works: his "Secret Penitent," his "Knight's Expiation, and other Poems," his "Lyra Sacra," his "Individual Sanctity," his "Verses for the Suffering," "Parish Sermons," "Sermons preached in Westminster Abbey," together with endless tracts and pamphlets. Everard purchased the "Secret Penitent" and the "Expiation," after turning over the leaves of the sermons, wondering at their commonplace character, and listening to a long eulogy on the author from the bookseller. Then he walked up the hill to the station, dipping into his new purchases as he went.

Having claimed his modest possessions, he had them conveyed to the George Inn, where he dined in a first-floor room with a bow window looking out on the sunny, bustling High Street; and while he dined he turned over the leaves of the dean's book, recognizing Cyril's style and certain peculiar turns of thought and traits of character as he read, and feeling more and more that neither the poems nor the devotions were the work of a conscious hypocrite. From an artistic point of view, they were not calculated to take the world by storm; but there was an unmistakable ring of reality throughout, which entitled them to respect, and accounted for the influence Dean Maitland was said to exercise over men's minds. The "Secret Penitent" had passed through many editions. It must have comforted the souls of thousands of human beings; it could only have been written by a man of deep religious convictions and high-toned morality.

Everard sat in the bow window, listening to the hum of the streets and the cadences of the bells, and pondering with a bewildered mind over this enigma of human character; and again he wondered, as he had so often wondered during the earlier days of miserable brooding in his captivity, how it was possible that such a man could have sinned so heavily? He recalled his sensitive refinement, his excessive exaltation of the spiritual above the animal, his scorn for the facile follies of youth, his piety, the purity of his emotions, his almost womanly tenderness, and marvelled with a bewildered amazement. He had himself not been unac-

quainted with the fires of temptation, but his life had been unscathed, nevertheless, because he had been strong enough to resist. But that such fires should have power over Cyril seemed incredible, especially when he remembered his austere, almost ascetic life.

Equally strange did it appear to Cyril himself, as he lay prostrate before the crucifix, face to face with his sin, and wondering if indeed he were the same man as he who went astray twenty years ago.

Yet the first sin was simple enough, given the components of Cyril's character and Alma's, the strange and inexplicable entanglement of the animal and the spiritual in human nature, and the blind madness in which passion, once kindled, involves the whole being.

Alma was then innocent of heart; but what is innocence before the fierce flame of temptation, unless guarded by high principle and severe self-mastery? Cyril could not live without adoration, and when Marion turned from him, he caught at that unconsciously offered him elsewhere, telling himself that there could be no harm to such as he, above temptation as he was, in watching the impassioned light of Alma's beautiful eyes, and that pity required him to pour some kindness into so stricken and guileless a heart.

So in those idle days of the Shotover curacy he trod the primrose path of dalliance with a careless and unguarded heart, and did not waken to a sense of danger until he found himself and another precipitated downwards into the very gulfs of hell. The shock of the fall sobered him, and suddenly quenched the delirium of the senses which had hitherto blinded him, and left a mingled loathing and contempt in its place; and the abasement of his own fall and the terrible sense of having wrought the ruin of another stirred the yet unwakened depths of his nature, and kindled the first faint beginnings of deeper moral and spiritual life. Had he but possessed the courage and strength of will to accept the consequences, to confess where confession was due, and to atone as far as atonement was possible, both he and the more innocent partner of his guilt might have recovered moral health, and even happiness, and he might have led the noblest if not perhaps the happiest of lives, deriving strength from his very weakness.

For his life had till then been untempted, and all his impulses had been good and beautiful. But he was a coward, and loved the praise of men. And more than all things and persons he loved Cyril Maitland. He was also a self-deceiver; he drugged his conscience, and was dragged into the tortuous windings of his

own inward deceit; and thus he fell from depth to depth, like Lucifer, falling all the deeper because of the height from which he fell, until he finished in the perversion of his moral being with the deed of a Judas. Of that last iniquity he never dared think.

Everard read and pondered, and pondered and read, and was filled with awe and pity. Then, laying the books aside with a sense of joy in his newly gained freedom, he took his hat and sauntered along the dusk, yet unlighted streets, letting his fancy dwell on brighter themes.

He had not gone far before he met a man who looked curiously at him, turned after he had passed, and again studied him intently, and finally, retracing his steps, accosted him.

"It is Dr. Everard, surely?" he said.

"That is my name," replied Everard, a little startled at the unfamiliar sound of the long unspoken name. "But I have not the pleasure of knowing yours," he added, scanning the figure and face of the respectable tradesman.

"Think of Dartmoor and No. 56," replied the tradesman, in a low tone.

A light of recognition broke over Everard's face, and he clasped the offered hand with a cordial greeting.

"It is no wonder that you did not recognize me," the man said; "thanks to you, I make rather a different figure to what I did on the moor. But yours is a face not to be forgotten."

"You are doing well, apparently, Smithson."

"I have a linendraper's shop, and I married a good girl, and we have two little ones, and we pay our way," he replied. "If you are going my way—I was just strolling up the hill for a breath of air—I will tell you all about it. You know, doctor, I could never have had the courage to face the world again but for you. Your words were always in my ears, 'The only atonement we can make is to accept the consequences manfully and conquer them.' It was uphill work, and I was often ready to throw up the sponge; but I stuck to it, and got through. Everybody knows my story, but they have mostly forgotten it. Many a time when I was ready to give up, and take to lying ways and hiding and going to the deuce again, I remembered how you, an honourable gentleman, who never did wrong, trusted and respected me in spite of all, and I thought, 'If he can respect me, others will,' and I held on. You remember the Putney Slogger?"

"Poor Slogger! he had a good heart, Jim."

"He goes straight now, and says it was you that heartened him to it. Has a greengrocer's cart, and deals fair."

Smithson had been a clerk in a mercantile office, and, falling

into dissipated ways and consequent debt, helped himself to petty sums, which gradually grew larger, until the usual end of such a course was reached—an appearance in the prisoner's dock and a sentence of penal servitude. He was barely twenty when Everard made his acquaintance at Dartmoor, and a more hopeless human being than he did not exist. He had been brought up by an uncle, who now washed his hands of him for ever. Everard pitied the miserable lad, won his affections and confidence, showed him how he could shorten his term by good conduct, impressed upon him that one fault need not blight a man's life, and encouraged him to achieve a new reputation.

When he got his ticket-of-leave, he boldly offered his services in shops and offices at a low price, in consideration of his antecedents, and, after many rebuffs and much privation during a time when he kept himself alive by casual manual labour, by dint of persistence and watching the time when employers were short-handed, he got himself taken on as assistant in a draper's shop, for which he had done errands and odd jobs.

Here he suffered much misery from the taunts and practical jokes of his fellow-shopmen, who managed to get hold of his history, the truth of which he did not deny. Did any petty dishonesty occur, suspicion turned at once to the gaol-bird; nay, was anything lost it was laid to his account. More than once he was on the point of being taken into custody, when his innocence was proved; and once the roasting and sending to Coventry he underwent at the hands of his comrades had become so intolerable that, in his desperation, he offered to fight each man separately, in order of seniority, on the condition that the conquered were never again to allude to his unfortunate past. His challenge was refused on the ground that no man could sully his hands by fighting him, but one or two of the better disposed from that day dropped the cruel tyranny; others followed their example, and Smithson gradually earned a character and received full salary.

Then he saved money, and, having gained the affections of a girl in the millinery department of his house, felt that he had won the battle of life. They put their savings together and started in a humble way on their own account, and now they had a large establishment, and paid their way. They did not, of course, parade Smithson's antecedents; but they were determined to have no concealments, and intended that their children, when of fit age, should know the whole story. Smithson now related to Everard how, mindful of his own desperate struggles and misery on leaving prison, he tried to lend others a helping hand, by giving them employment. It was, however, found extremely

difficult to mix them with people of good reputation. The end of it was that his entire staff, both of house and shop, consisted of criminals, all of whom were supposed to ignore the antecedents of the others, and many of whom believed the others to be spotless. Many, whom he was unable to employ himself, Smithson had set going by offering security for their integrity, and by this means had had the happiness of setting a number of fallen creatures upon their feet again.

"But are you never deceived or robbed?" asked Everard, who was deeply interested in his friend's narration.

Smithson smiled, and replied that his trust had more than once been abused, but more frequently justified. That very week he had paid a hundred pounds surety money.

"You will not make a fortune at this rate, Jim."

"No, doctor; but we are content to pay our way, and we like helping people better than getting money," he replied. "My wife is greatly set on that, especially on helping the women. Come and see her; she has heard many a tale of you. It will be supper-time by the time we are back."

Everard gladly accepted this invitation, and found among Smithson's staff another old prison friend, whose memory of him was as grateful as his employer's. Smithson showed him the photograph of a refined-looking woman, with a pleasing face. "Our forewoman," he said.

"But surely there is nothing against her," said Everard.

"She had ten years for killing her husband," replied Smithson. "Capital woman of business, and the sweetest temper. The dean got hold of her, and sent her to me. He stands surety for those who have no character. Ah! no one knows the good that man does!"

"Do you mean the Dean of Belminster?" asked Everard, in a hard voice.

"Of course; *the* dean—Dean Maitland."

Everard again looked at the handsome milliner, whose face was as gentle as it was refined, and could not help asking what led this amiable person to resort to the extreme measure of murdering her husband. No doubt he deserved it, he thought; but then, so many husbands do, that it would cause considerable social inconvenience to condone such acts.

"She did it in a passion, poor girl. The fellow was a drunken brute, years older than she, and he used to beat her and drag her about by the hair night after night. She put up with it, as so many poor things do, and went starved and barefoot, though they were well-to-do people. But one night he came home drunk as

usual, and dashed the baby against the wall, and she took up a knife and stabbed him to death."

"And the baby?"

"The baby is now in Earlswood, a hopeless idiot. She hopes to have it home to tend some day. It was a clever little thing, just beginning to talk. Nobody but the dean and we two guess there is anything wrong in her past. She is only four and thirty now, and much admired. My wife is very fond of her."

"Have you any more murderers?" asked Everard.

"Not at present. We are mostly thieves and forgers just now, and all first convictions. Ah, doctor! the Almighty can bring good out of evil, and it was a happy day for many besides me when first I saw your kind face in that awful place. Nobody but you ever told me that good is stronger than evil. You said it in the exercise-yard that cold, foggy Sunday, while all that vicious talk was going on round us, and the Mauler was making his filthy jokes."

"That is all over now, Jim, thank God!" said Everard.

Then the former comrades parted, Everard deeply moved by what he had seen and heard, and half doubting if the pleasant, open face of the philanthropic linendraper, with its look of grave thought and settled happiness, could indeed be the same as that white, haggard, abject face with the despairing eyes which had so moved his pity years ago in the dreary prison, and thankful for his long agony if it had been the salvation of but one fellow-creature.

The next evening found him in the nave of the cathedral some time before the appointed hour for the lecture, for the verger had warned him that the attendance would be very large. The sun was still shining warmly on the lime-tree avenue outside, making the fresh foliage glow like a jewel of unearthly radiance in its blended gold and green translucence, throwing long powdery shafts of gold through the windows up into the dim recesses of the groined roof, and disclosing carven nooks only thus touched by the midsummer glory, and dark all the year long besides. But the body of the cathedral was solemnly dusk, and great masses of shadow brooded in the choirs, transepts, and chantries, and each brotherhood of massed pillars in the nave was bound with a girdle of tiny fire-points, which were to grow larger with the gathering gloom.

Everard watched the great stream of worshippers pour steadily and quietly in and fill the long lines of chairs, which made the pillars look more lofty and the soaring roof farther off than ever. They were chiefly men, the lectures being specially given

for working men; but women were not excluded, and in some cases accompanied a husband, a father, or a brother. Men with hard and stained hands, with clothes still redolent of the putty, paint, or oil of the day's labours, men with rugged, eager faces and athletic frames, for the most part; also the pallid, weak-kneed tailors, shoemakers, and other indoor-labourers.

Clerks and shopmen were also there, with men of a higher standing still; but it was the hard-handed fellows in whom Everard found himself most interested—those extremely human creatures in whom the elementary instincts and passions are still so active and unchecked, and whose intellects are so starved and yet so unspoiled. How would the refined and cultivated dean touch these? he wondered. He had lived among them so long himself that he had acquired a strong affection for the raw material of human nature; but what link was there between the delicate-handed Cyril and these untutored sons of impulse? A link there surely must be, or they would not thus come pouring in to hear him.

Far down among the hard visages of the artisans, Everard saw some black-coated, clerical-looking men, whose peculiar half-finished appearance proclaimed them to be dissenting ministers, and he remembered how the verger told him that the popular Spurgeon himself did not disdain to try and catch the secret of the dean's golden-mouthed eloquence.

Such an agitation prevaded his being, that even the quiet majesty of the great dim cathedral could scarcely calm him. He could now count the hours before his meeting with Lilian, and another second might bring him face to face with Cyril, whom he had last seen in the terrible moment of his sentence. It seemed as if the service would never begin. The worshippers still poured in, the nave was full; but where were the clergy? The organ had been sounding for some time—soft, mellow music, as soothing as the wave-lullaby of the summer sea, with no hint of slumbering tempests, and a sick fancy took Everard's shaken mind that something was wrong, and Cyril would never come.

He seemed to have been looking at that dark sea of earnest faces, and hearing that solemn, wave-like music, for ever in the beam-broken dusk of the vast building. But at last a melody rose slowly, like an ocean spirit, out of the softly breaking waves of music, and floated away over its surface; it was Mendelssohn's, "If with all your hearts ye truly seek me"—the same which Cyril had listened to in the hour of his desperate inward conflict eighteen years ago, and the small choir entered with two clergymen, one of whom wore the scarlet hood of a doctor over his

snowy surplice, and whom he heard it whispered was no other than the great dean.

He had so stationed himself, partly with a view to being unseen by the preacher, that he only caught a brief glimpse of the procession, and lost sight of the dean entirely when the latter took the place he occupied during the prayers, so that he could not recognize him.

Cyril had risen that morning refreshed by sleep, and had looked upon the disturbing events of the previous evening from quite another point of view. In the evening, alone in the silence of his study, he had been a sinful man, face to face with the awful consequences of his guilt, prostrate before the God whose laws he had broken, and whose priesthood he had dishonoured. In the sunny morning, at the breakfast table, surrounded by an adoring family, with servants attentive to his will, with a pile of correspondence before him—correspondence in which the Dean of Belminster was asked to do this and that, and implored to give advice or attendance on the other; correspondence relating to the Bishopric of Warham, which was now virtually his own—he was another man: he was the Dean of Belminster, the Bishop-Designate of Warham, the friend of princes and ministers, the popular author, the chosen guide of troubled consciences. This man naturally thought in other ways than the conscience-stricken sinner alone with his guilt.

While breakfasting and chatting pleasantly with his children, and with Miss Mackenzie and the German tutor, both of whom were under the spell of his fascination, an under-current of thought passed through his mind on the subject of last night's unsuspected agony. While rapidly running through his correspondence, and answering letter after letter with the swift skill of a practised pen; while entering the cathedral behind the white-robed choir; while listening to the chanted prayers and psalms; while sending his beautiful voice pealing down the dim aisles on the wings of the ancient Hebrew poems;—the same undercurrent of thought flowed silently on.

Was it his fault that a series of blunders had condemned Everard to an excessive sentence for a crime that was never committed? Was he responsible for the severity of the judge, the stupidity of the jury, the unlucky blunderings of the witnesses—above all, for the perjury of Alma Lee? A man may love a woman who has sinned, but few men love women who sin for their sake, even though that sin be of their own compassing. Cyril had turned from Alma after her first fall; but when she stood and swore to the undoing of Everard, he loathed her with an

unspeakable loathing. He said to himself that she was thoroughly bad, the cause of every trouble he had ever known; as the sons of Adam always do when they sin, he threw all the blame on the woman.

He argued within himself that it was now too late for reparation; by this time Everard must have nearly completed his term of imprisonment. His life had been hopelessly ruined; to stir the muddy waters of that bitter past would be merely to bring irretrievable ruin on others. Alma could not, he thought, clear Everard without betraying him.

And then he considered his position in the Church, his elevation in men's minds, the influence he had upon his generation—an influence depending entirely on moral spotlessness, and asked what sin could equal that of ruining his own career of exceptional usefulness? To comfort the morbid terrors of a dying reprobate, was he to bring disgrace upon the national Church, of which he was a chief ornament; nay, upon the very Christianity of which he had been so famous a teacher? Was he to blast the prospects of his innocent children; to bring ruin on them, and disgrace upon his aged father and upon the honoured name that even his base-born son revered? The thing was monstrous; the more he looked at it the more monstrous it appeared.

Then he remembered how cruel Fate had been to him, how good his intentions ever were, how far he had been from dreaming one of the consequences which wrapped him round now in a net of such complicated meshing. As to Alma, it turned him sick to think of a sin which his inmost soul loathed; he must have been mad, possessed, suffering from some supernatural assault of the powers of darkness—and he had repented, Heaven alone knew how bitterly!

He thought of the fatal hour when he disguised himself in his friend's dress, with no thought but the desire of escaping recognition and dread of bringing scandal upon his cloth, never dreaming that he would be mistaken for Everard, who was singularly unlike him in face and manner. He thought of the heavy stick he had taken, simply because a man likes to have something in his hand, and which he had thrown away before the struggle; of Ben Lee's unexpected appearance; of his own wish to appease the anger of the man he had so cruelly wronged; of Lee's unbridled fury; of the violence of his assault upon him; and of the fatal blow which had been dealt with no ill intention, but was merely the rebound of that which Lee was dealing him.

In all this he felt that he had been the sport of a cruel destiny,

the fool of Fortune. And had he not suffered enough to atone for more than men could ever impute to him. He thought of the wife of his youth, first estranged, and then fading before him; of the sweet faces of his children, and the graves which closed over them in their loveliest bloom, just as each had twined itself round his heart. He thought of his son and his hopeless affliction, and his heart bled.

Yet he intended to go to the dying woman. But not immediately; he had pressing duties to perform first, and who knew what might turn up in the mean time? Besides, he needed time for thought before meeting her.

In the afternoon there came a second message from the sick woman, bidding him come that day, as she might not live to see another. He could not come at the moment, having just then an engagement that could not be postponed; he promised, with a sick heart, to come in an hour's time.

The hour passed. He took his hat and yet lingered, going back to give some message to Marion, then again to look into Everard's study and see how he was getting on; then at last he issued from beneath the light colonnade before his door, and set his face towards the hospital. He had not left the close when a messenger from the hospital met him, and gave the dean a note, which he opened with trembling fingers. It was to inform him that Alma was dead.

He turned swiftly back, and did not stop till he reached home, entered his study, and locked the door; then he threw himself into a chair, laid his arms on the table, and, letting his face fall upon them, burst into tears and sobbed heavily for some time. Something had turned up, after all, and he was spared the horror of that dreaded interview, and could only hope that Alma's secret had died with her.

He did not leave his study until it was time to go to the cathedral, which he did with a sense of unspeakable relief. The reaction after last night's agony and to-day's conflict made him see everything in the brightest colours, and a delicious languor fell upon his wearied brain, a languor so deep that he felt incapable of rousing himself to the effort of preaching. His was, however, one of those finely strung, nervous natures which respond to the will as a thoroughbred horse does to the whip, and do what is required of them in spite of exhaustion up to the last gasp; and when the brief prayers were ended, and the great volume of men's voices rolled out the hymn before the sermon, he pulled himself together and ascended the pulpit with his accustomed air of reverent dignity; and, having turned up the gas-beads at the desk

and placed his manuscript conveniently, sent a piercing, comprehensive glance all round the vast building and over the wide sea of rough and earnest faces which flooded it, as if taking the measure of the human material spread out, plastic and receptive, before him.

The sight inspired him, and sent a thrill through every fibre of his being; for his was one of those magnetic natures whose strong attractive power over masses is in direct proportion to the stimulating power of masses upon themselves. He could not preach to empty benches, but when he found himself face to face with a multitude, he threw his own personality into it in such a manner that he became, as it were, a part of his audience, and made it a part of himself, so that his own emotions thrilled his hearers, and theirs reacted upon him. This was one reason why the sermons Everard thought so commonplace when printed had such a living force when spoken.

Everard, who was so placed by a cluster of pillars as to be half shielded by them, advanced his head and gazed over his hymn-book; so that he could see the preacher without much of his own face being seen, and his first glance at the face, islanded from the dusk in the ruddy glow of gaslight, told him that he must have recognized Cyril anywhere, and set his heart beating vehemently with a mixture of love and hate.

At forty-three Dean Maitland was in his fullest prime; the years had ripened instead of wasting and crushing him, as they had Everard. The dark brown hair waved as gracefully as in his youth over his broad, clear brow, while the few silver threads in it were unseen; the finely cut, closely shaven features were but little sharpened in outline; the light blue eyes were more sunken, and they glowed with an intenser radiance. The old face was there, but the expression was altered; there was a hard austerity about the mouth when in repose that verged upon cruelty, though no one who had ever seen those fine lips curve into their winning smile when speaking could accuse them of anything harsher than a severe purity quite in character with the man's writings and his calling, and during the most impassioned glances of the wonderfully expressive eyes they had a certain gleam which suggested the quaint and quiet humour which made the dean so delightful in society.

Yet over all the face and in the whole bearing, Everard saw an expression he had never seen before, and which he could not analyze, but which struck him with keen pain, and called to his mind Milton's description of the fallen seraph on whose faded cheek sate care.

All that evening Everard's mind was haunted by the image of the fallen angel, once the brightest of the sons of morning, weighted with his unutterable woe, and yearning for the lost glory that could never more be his.

In the mean time, the closing notes of the hymn died away in the long and lingering cadences of the organ, the great congregation seated itself with a subdued rustle and murmur, and the dean, in his magnificent voice and pure enunciation, gave out his text.

CHAPTER IV.

THE voice which had been so full of music in Cyril Maitland's youth, had now become not only an instrument of great compass and rich tone, but it was played by an artist who was a perfect master of his craft. It was said of the Bishop of Belminster that he could pronounce the mystic word "Mesopotamia" in such a manner as to affect his auditors to tears; but of the dean it might be averred that his pronunciation of "Mesopotamia" caused his listeners' hearts to vibrate with every sorrow and every joy they had ever known, all in the brief space of time occupied by the utterance of that affecting word. Everard had heard this saying in Belminster, and knew well what Cyril's voice was of old, but he was quite unprepared for the tremendous rush of emotion that overwhelmed him when the dean opened his clear-cut lips and said, with the pathos the words demanded, "We took sweet counsel together, and walked in the house of God as friends."

He then paused, as his custom was, to let the words sink deeply into his hearers' minds before he began his discourse, and Everard's very life seemed to pause with him, while he felt himself shaken in his innermost depths. Then he remembered that Cyril's passionate sermon upon innocence was the last he had heard from him. Since that he had heard only the discourses of prison chaplains to an accompaniment of whispered blasphemy and filth. Once more he saw the little church at Malbourne, the beautiful young priest offering the chalice to the kneeling people in the wintry sun-gleams; once more he saw the shadowy figure in the afternoon dusk, uttering his agonized appeals to the startled listeners below.

"Yes, my brothers," said the dean (he eschewed "brethren," as both conventional and obsolete, and dwelt with a loving intonation on the word "brothers"), "Jesus Christ and Judas took

sweet counsel together, and walked in the house of God as *friends*, strange as it appears to us, difficult as it is to realize a fact so startling, since in all the whole range of the world's tragic history there has never been found a character so vile as the one or so spotless as the other.

"Yet they were not only friends, but they actually took sweet counsel together. Picture that to yourselves, dear brothers: Christ had pleasant conversations with Judas, asked his opinion on high and holy subjects, listened to his words, as you and I listen to the words of those dear and near to us. Was there ever a more strangely assorted pair? And yet"—the dean paused, and sent the penetrating radiance of his gaze sweeping over the mass of upturned faces before him—"it may be that even now, to-night, with these eyes of mine, I see among you, my brothers, in this very house of God, another pair strangely like that mentioned by David in his prophecy—some loyal follower of Christ taking sweet counsel and walking as a friend with such an one as Judas, money-loving, ambitious, false; musing even now, with the echoes of psalms and holy words in his ears, how he may betray the friend who trusts and loves him. Alas, my brothers, how often is such a companionship seen; and how often, how sadly often, is the guileless friend whose trust and love is betrayed, a woman! 'Nay,' I hear you say, 'we have our faults, we don't pretend to be saints, but we are not Judases.' Dare you say that you are no Judas?" he added, in sharp, incisive tones, while his glance seemed to single some individual from the throng and to pierce to his very marrow—"you, who sold your wife's happiness and your children's bread for a pot of beer? or you?" and here the penetrating gaze seemed to single out another, while the preacher launched at him another sharp denunciation of some homely, everyday vice, using the most direct and forcible words the language contains to give vigour to his censures, till the cold sweat stood upon rugged brows, some women wept furtively, and the dean's keen glance perceived the inward tremblings of many a self-convicted sinner.

The preacher then observed that the popular conception of Judas as a truculent thief whose ruffianly character was ill-concealed by his thorough-paced hypocrisy was probably false, and pointed out that Judas must have appeared to the world in which he lived a highly respectable and well-conducted person, if not a very saint. Nay, it was his own opinion that Judas was actually a very superior being, a man of lofty aspirations and pure life, a patriot—one who looked ardently for the promised Messiah, and had sufficient faith to recognize him in the son of the Nazarene

carpenter. Why, he asked his auditors, if he had not been all this, should he have joined that little band of obscure men, those peasants and fishers, those men of austere morality and lofty converse, who had left all to follow the young peasant Prophet who had not even a roof to shelter Him?

He drew a beautiful sketch of the sweet and simple brotherhood of disciples clustering about the Master, who seemed to have inspired them up to the moment of the crucifixion more with tender and passionate human devotion than with awe and worship, and with whom they lived in such close and intimate communion, taking sweet counsel together on the loftiest subjects, and yet sharing the most trivial events of everyday life; and asked his hearers if they thought a mere money-lover and traitor could have endured such a fellowship, or been endured by it. But if Judas were indeed worthy to be chosen as one of that small and select band (and it was an undoubted fact that he was thought worthy and tenderly loved up to the last by his Divine Master), how was it that he fell into so black a sin, and stamped his name upon all time as a symbol of the utmost degradation of which man is capable?

"Ah! my brothers," said the dean, "he *was* a hypocrite, but so consummate a hypocrite that he deceived himself. He knew that he loved God and his Master and Friend, but he did not know, or would not know, that he loved mammon—the riches of this world and its pomps and vanities, its fleeting honours and transient foam-flake of fame—better. The bag naturally fell to him because it had no attractions for the disciples whose hearts were set upon heavenly treasure only. The renown of the miracles he witnessed spread so that idlers flocked as to a show to see them; and this and the hope of the revival of the Jewish monarchy which filled the minds of all the disciples till after Calvary, stimulated the man's ambition, which he probably mistook for devout zeal till that terrible hour, when the contempt and hatred which fell upon his Teacher and Friend made him desert the falling King in his disappointed ambition, and finally betray Him.

"I charge you, my brothers," continued the dean, with a passion that shook his audience, "that you beware of self-deception. You may deceive others—yea, those who love you most dearly and live with you most intimately, who sit by your hearth and break bread at your table, through long, long years you may deceive them; and you may deceive yourselves—you may devote all to God, and yet keep back one darling sin, one cherished iniquity that is poisoning the very springs of your being, like the young man who made the great refusal, like Ananias and Sapphira·

but remember, *you cannot deceive God!*"—here the preacher paused and choked back a rising sob—"all is open in His sight"—here the dean trembled, and his voice took a tone of heart-broken anguish—"There, my brothers, up there is no shuffling."

There was silence for some moments in the vast building, broken only by the deep or quick breathing of the hushed, attentive multitude, and the great secret of the dean's power flashed swiftly upon Everard's mind. It was the fact that the thoughts he was uttering were not his own; that he was possessed and carried away by some irresistible power, which forced him to speak what was perhaps pain and grief to him, what was utterly beyond his will. A strange power, truly, which made Ezekiel pronounce his own dire mischance, and predict the taking away the desire of his eyes for which he dared not mourn; which made Balaam bless when he tried to curse; and caused Isaiah to foretell in torrents of fiery eloquence things he desired in vain to look into—a great and awful gift when given in even the smallest measure, a gift called in olden times prophecy, in these genius.

A deep awe and compassion fell upon Everard as he looked upon the agitated and inspired orator, whose soul was so deeply stained with guilt, and he thought of the disobedient prophet and of other sinful men, singled out, in spite of their frailty, for the supreme honour of being the instruments of the Divine Will.

"Watch against secret sin," continued the preacher, in a low and earnest but distinct and audible voice. "Pray for broken hearts, failure, misery, anything but the gratified ambition, the fulfilled heart's desire which makes it impossible for you to renounce all and follow Christ." Then he spoke of the remorse of Judas and his miserable end; said that even he would have found instant forgiveness had he sought or desired it. But he probably did not think it would be given, since his own love was not large enough for such a forgiveness, and he thus shrank from the only possible healing for him. "My brothers," he said, in a voice which touched the very core of Everard's heart, "the man we think most meanly of is the man we have wronged."

He pointed out the difference between repentance and remorse; drew a vivid picture of the latter, which he said was the "sorrow of sorrows and the worst torture of hell." He said that nothing earthly could soothe that pain—not all the riches of the world; not the esteem of men; not the highest earthly renown, or the enjoyment of beauty, health, youth; not all the pleasures of sense or intellect; not the sweetest and purest treasures of human affection; and the voice in which he said this was so exquisitely, so despairingly sad, that a wave of intensest pity rushed

over Everard's soul, and a great sob rose in his throat, and he knew that the long agony of the prison life, which had bowed his frame, broken his health, and shattered his nerves, if not his very intellect, was nothing in comparison with the secret tortures of the successful man who stood in purple and fine linen before him.

"Repent," continued the dean, in a voice of agonized supplication, "while repentance is possible. Put away the darling sin, whatever it may be, before it is inextricably wound about your heart-strings; remember that every moment's delay makes the heart harder and the task more difficult. Cut off the right hand, pluck out the right eye—— "

He broke off abruptly, turned pale to the lips, and seemed for a moment to fight for breath. "Oh, my God!" he exclaimed at last, in low, agonized, shuddering tones, so different from the full voice of impassioned appeal he had been using, that they sent an electric shock through the hushed listeners, while the chill drops beaded his brow, and he gazed fixedly with horror-struck eyes before him, like one compelled by some irresistible spell to gaze on what his soul most abhors.

It was the most acute moment in Everard's life, one to be remembered when all else had faded—the moment when betrayer and betrayed met face to face, gazing into each other's eyes under a fascination that each strove vainly to resist. Under the spell of the dean's eloquence, Everard had gradually advanced his head from the shelter of the pillars, the gas-beaded girdle of which, in the deepening of the summer twilight, cast a strong illumination upon his features, and thus attracted the preacher's gaze. That awful meeting of glances seemed to Everard to endure for an eternity, during which the breathing of the hushed congregation and the casual stirring of a limb here and there were distinctly audible in the silence.

Who shall say what these two men, between whom was so much love and such terrible wrong, saw in the eyes which had met so often in friendship in the far-off days, when each trusted the other so fully? Certain it is that there was neither rebuke nor reproach in Everard's gaze, and that the dominant feeling in his stirred heart was a desire to comfort the terrible misery in the false friend's eyes. But though there was no reproach in the honest and trustful brown eyes—sunken as they were in dark orbits caused by long suffering—the bowed, gaunt form, the haggard, worn features, the sad look of habitual hopeless pain, the untimely grey hairs and aged appearance, struck into the betrayer's soul like so many burning daggers tipped with poison. He remembered his friend as he had last seen him in the beauty

and vigour of early manhood, happy, hopeful, full of intellect and life, and glowing with generous feeling, and the sharp contrast revealed to him, in one flash, the wickedness of his deed. There sat the friend who had loved and trusted him, marred, crushed, and broken by his own iniquity.

He longed for the massive pillars to crumble to ruins, and the high stone roof to crash in and hide him from that terrible gaze, the more terrible because so gentle; he wished the solid pavement to yawn and swallow him up. A burning pain was stabbing him in the breast, the clusters of lights danced madly among the shadows before him, the great white sea of human faces surged in heaving billows in his sight, and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth when he tried to speak.

Long as it seemed to those two awe-struck gazers, it was in reality but a few seconds before the dean averted his gaze by a strong effort, and spoke.

"I am not well," he said quietly; and, turning, he descended the pulpit and vanished among the shadows, while a canon present said a final prayer and gave the blessing.

From the comments of the congregation as they streamed out beneath the avenue of lindens, Everard gathered that it was not the first time the dean had been taken ill while preaching, the excitement of which appeared to be too much for his physical strength.

He lingered about the cathedral precincts in the pleasant summer dusk, through which a few pale stars were gleaming softly, and listened to the conversation around him, gazing wistfully at the Deanery, under a strong impulse to enter it. He contented himself, however, with joining a little group of working men, who, after an interval, went to the house and inquired for the health of the popular preacher, and who were told that the dean had recovered from the spasmodic seizure to which he was subject, and was now resting.

A clergyman had passed out of the cathedral at Everard's side, with rather a strange smile on his face, and had observed to a lady who was with him, "How did you like the play?"

"What *do* you mean?" she returned, with an indignant accent.

"Well, did you ever see a better actor than the Anglican Chrysostom?" he continued, with a sarcastic accent, which caused her to accuse him of professional jealousy.

This man had heard the last dying words of Alma Judkins a few hours before.

Everard was so shaken by what he experienced in the cathedral, that he could not return to his hotel, where his dinner was awaiting

him, but walked rapidly through the dim streets, and climbed the hill to breathe the free, fresh air of the wide downs, whence he saw the city, starred with fire-points, lying like a dropped and dimmed constellation in the valley beneath.

There he thought much, walking swiftly beneath the clear, quiet sky, pale in the June twilight, and gleaming with languid stars, until something of the holy calm of Nature had entered his breast, and he returned, quieted, yet full of deeply stirred feelings, to the George Inn.

Then he took a pen, and wrote as follows:—

"DEAR CYRIL,

"I need not tell you that I was in the cathedral to-night, since I saw with what pain you recognized me. You possess the great secret of eloquence, earnestness and genuine feeling, and your sermon revealed to me how terribly you have suffered. You will not be surprised to hear that I know *all*. I did not suspect it until that poor girl swore against me in the witness-box, when the whole truth flashed upon me, and every little incident connected with that sad affair became clear and comprehensible. That was the saddest moment in my life, far more bitter than the moment of my conviction or that of my severe sentence. The man never lived who was dearer to me than you, and I revered you as a man reveres his own conscience. I thought then that there could be no suffering to equal mine, but to-night I learned from your own lips, my poor Cyril, that there is a deeper anguish still, an anguish that you have borne secretly for eighteen mortal years beneath a semblance of outward prosperity. How shall I comfort you? If my forgiveness can avail anything, it is yours fully and freely. Remorse, as you said to-night, is wholly poisonous; it is futile to lament the unreturning past. Dear Cyril, let us manfully face the consequences, and cease bewailing what cannot be mended. Much peace and usefulness, yes, and much happiness, may yet be yours. I have suffered not only the penalty, but an exceeding penalty for that tragic moment in the wood—against my will, it is true; but now I ask you, who believe in vicarious sacrifice, to take those eighteen years as a free gift, and remember that, as far as this life is concerned, that poor fellow's death has been amply atoned for. I see that you are struggling with yourself to confess and make atonement before the world, but the time has gone by for that, and it could avail nothing now. Lilian has always been convinced of my innocence, and nearly all others to whom my good name was dear are gone. I have lived through the obloquy as far as the world is concerned; the revelation of the truth could only bring

sorrow unspeakable to many, and no help to me. Besides, you have unusual gifts; you have acquired a position and a character which give you singular power over men; you ought not to trifle with these. If I am to be useful to my fellow-creatures, it must be in quite other ways. But you, with your remarkable gifts and the great position you have achieved, have also incurred a great responsibility, and the very failings and faults which have caused such pain have led you through such unusual paths of spiritual experience as may give you unusual power in dealing with the sickness of men's souls. You have told men the terrors of remorse; tell them now the peace of repentance, the joy of forgiveness. If you need a penance, take that of silence on that one sad subject. Let that lie between you and me as a bond of friendship, and let it be heard in the ears of men no more; and let us meet again on the old pleasant footing. I have seen and spoken with your son, and heard his beautiful voice, and I am glad that he bears our name. May Heaven's blessing and peace be yours for ever!

"Your friend,

"HENRY EVERARD."

It was not until the following morning that the dean received this letter, along with many others, at breakfast.

Physical pain had mercifully come to his relief in the moment of extreme agony in the cathedral, and so benumbed and clouded his mental faculties. It had further obliged him to use a prescription of his physician's intended for such seizures, and of an anæsthetic nature, so that he had passed the night in artificial slumber, if that could be called slumber which was animated by a continual torturing consciousness of the dreaded face he had seen in the cathedral, and an unspeakable terror of some impending descent into yet greater misery.

Yet he awoke in the morning so permeated with this dread consciousness that he had not to face the shock of emerging from the balm of oblivon to a new and unfamiliar grief, the shock that greets us on the threshold of a new day with such a numbing power in the beginning of a fresh sorrow. Of course, he had contemplated the possibility of such a meeting as that of the previous evening; but he had no idea it was so near, since Lilian had long ceased to give him any intelligence of Everard, and also, with his characteristic unreason, he hoped something might in the mean time turn up. Everard's death was one of these bright possibilities.

He did not recognize the handwriting, changed as it was by long disuse and the stiffening of the joints resulting from habitual hard labour, and ran rapidly through the pile of letters, taking the

known correspondents first. It was only when he had opened the envelope, and read the familiar commencement of "Dear Cyril," that the writing struck a chord in his memory, and he turned with a sick dread to the signature.

Marion saw him turn livid, and then, when he glanced rapidly over the contents, flush a deep red. Then he laid the letter aside, and went on quietly with his breakfast, joining, in his accustomed manner, in the household chat; but he ate little, which Marion attributed to his recent seizure and the anodyne he had taken.

Immediately after breakfast he went to his study, giving orders to Benson, as he frequently did, that he was on no account to be disturbed till luncheon, at which meal he appeared as usual.

Marion observed, and remembered afterwards, that he was extremely pale and very quiet, only addressing herself and her brother occasionally, and then with unusual gentleness. He was always gentle to them, for he was a most tender father, passionately fond of his children, and having the art, by virtue of his winning manner and personal charm, to keep them in absolute discipline while indulging them to the utmost, so that, without ever using a harsh word to them, his will was their law, and they obeyed him without knowing it; but to-day his gentleness amounted to tenderness, and his voice and glances, when he spoke to them, were like a caress.

"Well, Marry," he said, breaking into a conversation between the children and their tutor and governess, which he had evidently not heard, "what do you say to running down to Portsmouth to your Uncle Keppel's with Everard for a few days?"

"Nothing, papa," she replied, with her pretty spoilt air.

"Would you not like to go, dear?" he asked. "The sea is charming just now, and all the naval gaieties are in full swing. The new ironclad is waiting for you to inspect and help launch her, and your cousins are all at home, and Everard would enjoy the military bands and the bathing; eh, laddie?"

"Well, I suppose it will be a fair time to go; but how can you get away?" said Marion, when her father replied that he did not intend to accompany them.

"Then, we don't want to go," she returned; and Everard endorsed her words heartily.

"You don't get tired of your old father?" he asked, his eyes clouding and his voice quivering a little.

"There never was such a daddy-sick pair," laughed Miss Mackenzie.

"But you cannot always be tied on to the old father," said the dean, pinching Marion's soft cheek. "Come now, suppose

you pack up your smartest bonnets and frocks, and Everard's violin, and run down this afternoon. Your Aunt Keppel will be at the station to meet you at six."

"To-day? Oh, papa! what can possess you?" cried Marion.

"Oh, not till Monday!" pleaded Everard. "I am to take a solo to-morrow afternoon."

"Never mind the solo, lad," said his father, looking wistfully on the boy's sightless face. "Dr. Rydal will recover from the shock; a little adversity will do him good, autocrat that he is. You will go, darlings, by the 4.30 train. And if the bonnets and frocks are not smart enough for fashionable Southsea, you can get what you want there. Here is a cheque, Marry. And there, Everard, is a sovereign for you to buy toffee with. Herr Obermann is tired of his unmanageable pupil, and will be glad of a holiday to rummage over old parchments with Canon Drake;" and the dean rose from the table with a look that said that the business was concluded, and strolled languidly into the garden, Everard's hand in his.

"Miss Mackenzie," said Marion, remaining behind a minute, "there is something unusual about papa to-day. Do you think I ought to leave him? He ate nothing; he looks ill."

"He is always languid and weak after one of his attacks, Marry. The great thing is not to worry him, and, of course, he has a great deal on his mind now. Perhaps, until the bishopric business is quite decided, he would rather have you out of the way."

Miss Mackenzie's words were reasonable, and Marion felt that she must abide by them, and yet she could not conquer the vague disquiet she felt on her father's account. She followed him into the old-fashioned, red-walled garden with a solicitude hitherto unknown in her spoilt-child existence, and watched him narrowly.

"You are becoming a perfect ogre, daddy, hustling us off in this despotic manner; now, isn't he, Everard?" she said, joining them.

"A regular tyrant," laughed the boy. "But, I say, why can't you come with us, papa? It is on your way to Osborne."

"Of course it is; how delightful!" added Marion.

"I am not going to Osborne," replied the dean.

"Not going to dine at Osborne to-night?" exclaimed the children, who knew that a royal invitation is also a command. "Why, what will the Queen say? Will she send you to the Tower?" asked Everard, his mind filled with visions of scaffolds and axes.

"Never mind the Queen," said the dean, sitting down on

a garden seat and placing the boy between his knees, and passing his arm round the girl with a grave and pre-occupied air, which surprised his daughter, whom he was wont perpetually to tease and banter in a way that she thought delightful. Neither of them spoke for a few minutes, and then the dean asked the children if they were happy, and they replied heartily in the affirmative, adding that they were always happy with him, and thought all pleasures dull without him.

"I have tried to make you happy," he said, in his rich, pathetic tones; "I have wished so much to give you a happy youth to look back upon. My own youth was very, very happy, and I have always been so thankful for it; it is a possession for a whole lifetime, in spite of the sorrow with which the world is filled, and which we must all plunge into sooner or later. Your father is a sinful man, dear children, but he has tried to be good to you—that has been his greatest earthly aim. And you have been dutiful and affectionate. I am a successful man, and have been able to give you a pleasant home, but who can say if it may last? Trouble may come—we may be parted. Well, dears, if that time comes, think gently of the father who, whatever his faults were, earnestly sought his children's happiness."

The children protested with half-frightened affection; but he scarcely heeded them, and, gently unwinding their clasping hands, withdrew, unable to speak for tears, and, waving them off with a gesture of command, went back to his study.

"Oh, Marry!" cried Everard, "something dreadful has happened. Perhaps the Queen is angry. What can it be?"

Marion comforted him with all the wisdom of her sixteen years, saying that there was probably some hitch about the bishopric, and this had saddened their father.

He took them to the station and saw them off, arranging all he could for their comfort and security, and embraced them on the public platform with unusual tenderness, apparently oblivious of all the bustle and noise going on around him. He put a basket of fruit into their hands to refresh them on the road when they were in the carriage, and then stood on the step and kissed and blessed them solemnly once more, and, when the train finally moved off, stood wistfully gazing until the last flutter of Marion's handkerchief was invisible in the distance.

All her life Marion remembered his yearning gaze and his pale, sad face, as he stood without a trace of his usual playful animation when in their presence, a solitary black figure, watching them with his hand shading his eyes, until the distance had swallowed them up.

"Can you see him still?" asked the blind boy.

"Not now; he is lost," replied Marion; and she burst into tears under the pressure of an indefinable sadness.

CHAPTER V.

EVERARD slept like an infant after writing his letter, and rose full of eager hope and trembling anticipation on the morrow, remembering that the day had at last dawned when he was to meet Lilian once more.

He might have seen her many times during his imprisonment, but he could not endure that she should submit to the restraints necessarily imposed on convicts' visitors, or that she should see him in his humiliation, and had thus declined her offered visits. He could not even bear to go to her straight from prison; he felt that some days at least were necessary to carry off the prison air and take away the contamination of those hated walls. He looked in a glass, and sighed deeply, thinking that he saw plainly written all over him, "ticket-of-leave man." As for his hands, which he had treated with unguents and cosmetics, and kept night and day in gloves, he looked at them in despair. The flattened finger-tips, broken and discoloured nails, distorted joints, and horn-hardened palms were beyond redemption. It seemed to his sensitive fancy that all the world must know as well as he that his peculiar gait was the result of the irons he had worn after his brief escape, and the sick thought came to him that his intellect must be as much marred as his body. He felt utterly ruined.

He lingered about Belminster till the afternoon, secretly cherishing a hope that Cyril might send some letter or message to the George for him; but nothing came, and he took his seat in the train with a disappointed heart.

A clergyman, in a round felt hat with a rosette and the longest of coats, was just stepping out of the down train as Everard was stepping in. They came face to face, and Everard stepped back to allow the other to pass, thus gaining a full and prolonged view of his features, while the clergyman passed gravely on, carelessly scanning Everard's face without a gleam of recognition in his own. But Everard knew him at once. It was his brother George.

Everard got in, the doors banged, the train moved off, and he found that his carriage was shared by an elderly man with a

clever, keen face, which seemed strangely familiar to him, though he could not identify it, search his memory as he would. The old gentleman apparently had the same degree of memory for Everard, since, after his first searching glance at him when he entered the carriage, he kept giving him furtive and puzzled looks over his papers. Presently the papers of both gentlemen were laid aside, and the stranger moved over to the corner seat opposite Everard, evidently prepared for a friendly chat, and made some remark on the line over which they were passing. His voice sent a strange tremor through Everard's too-sensitive nerves, and, after a brief interchange of commonplace, he told his *vis-à-vis* that his face and voice were familiar to him, but that he was unable to recall his name.

"You are associated in my mind with something of a distressing nature," he added.

"I was just about to observe the same with regard to you," replied his new-found acquaintance, "save that you are associated with nothing distressing to me. To tell the truth, my features are associated with distressing circumstances in a great many people's minds," he added, laughing. "My name is Manby, Sir William Manby," he explained, with the air of one uttering a rich joke.

"I now remember you perfectly," returned Everard, quietly, "though I cannot claim the honour of your acquaintance. My name is Everard, Henry Oswald Everard, and when I last saw you, you sentenced me to twenty years' penal servitude for a crime which I never committed."

"Good God!" exclaimed the judge, starting back with momentary dismay, but quickly recovering himself, and putting up his gold-rimmed eye-glasses and closely scrutinizing him. "Henry Everard, to be sure! Yes, yes, I remember the case perfectly. The jury were unanimous, the evidence clear;" and the judge thought within himself that to be alone in a railway carriage with a man one has given twenty years for a manslaughter one believes to be murder, is an awkward thing.

"The evidence was indeed clear," said Everard, "but it was misleading, nevertheless, and there was a terrible miscarriage of justice."

The quiet air with which he spoke, and the look of his careworn face, impressed the judge. He could not help giving some credence to his words.

"If you were indeed not guilty, Dr. Everard," he said, after looking thoughtfully at him for some moments, "there must have been some very hard swearing."

"There was," replied Everard. "There was perjury on the part of one witness."

"Its motive?"

"To shield the real culprit."

"The law gives you a remedy if you can but prove the perjury," said the judge.

"I do not wish to prosecute," replied Everard. "Besides, what court can give me back those years of imprisonment?"

"How many did you serve?"

"Eighteen."

"Eighteen years," returned the judge, his thoughts running back through that period of time, and taking count of the things that had occurred and the changes that had been wrought in it; "eighteen years! And you were then a young man."

Everard smiled sadly at the contrast these words implied.

"Then, you are only recently enlarged?" Sir William added.

"Last Monday. I have a ticket-of-leave."

The judge looked at the broken and prematurely aged man with an inward shudder. He thought of the long line of malefactors he had sentenced, not only to imprisonment, but even to death, and wondered if he could have pronounced those sentences if he had been doomed to see them carried out.

"I well remember the pain with which I passed your sentence," he said. "A judge need have a heart of iron and nerves of steel. But the evidence was so clear."

"You could do no otherwise. The jury found me guilty, and I could not clear myself."

"Eighteen years," continued the judge, in a voice which had a quiver in it. "I am an old man, Dr. Everard, an old man, and it cannot be many years at the latest before I must stand at the bar of a justice that cannot miscarry; but if I thought that I had condemned a fellow-creature unjustly to eighteen years' penal servitude——"

"Do not think it, dear sir," interrupted Everard, trying to soothe the rising agitation in the old man's mind; "the injustice cannot be laid to your charge. No human tribunal can be infallible; but, as you say, there is a Judge who cannot err, and when you and I are confronted at that bar, your verdict upon me will be reversed without blame to yourself."

"I trust so, I trust so," replied the old man; "and, in the mean time, I hope that you bear me no ill-will."

"Heaven forbid, whose instrument you are!" returned Everard, taking and warmly pressing the hand the judge offered him.

"I shall desire your further acquaintance, sir," said the old gentleman, when the train steamed into the Oldport station; "if not now, in a better world than this."

And they parted, Everard leaving the carriage, and standing with a throbbing heart on the platform, while his portmanteau was placed on a fly, and thinking how great was the contrast between his manner of leaving that station and returning to it. He left it in the keen wintry fog, with handcuffed wrists, in charge of constables, and returned shaking hands with his judge in the warm June sunshine.

It was strange to see the little well-known town basking in the summer heat, and filled with the familiar, homely stir of the market-day, just as it had done all those years ago, and he looked about at the houses and shops, with their friendly air of recognition, to see if there were any faces he knew. There stood the town hall, the earliest scene of his terrible humiliation, with its familiar colonnade and balcony, its clock striking four in the old homelike tones, and the gilt figures on its dial burning in the bright sunbeams. The stolid policemen were standing in the square in front of it, as they had done in the days of his trial. He recognized one, a grey-headed man in the stripes and dress of a sergeant, as the middle-aged constable who had conducted him to the magisterial presence, and wondered if the man remembered him.

The carriage seemed at the same time to crawl and to fly in the medley of feelings which urged him onwards and backwards. Would they never get out of Oldport? The streets were cumbered with carriers' carts and waggons; droves of pigs and bewildered cattle; dense-looking farmers, shabbily dressed, but concealing a fund of shrewd sense beneath their stolid countenances, and having well-lined pocket-books in their queer old coat-pockets; and denser-looking labourers, whose heavy air of stupidity was half assumed and half on the surface.

Smart new suburbs had put forth a pert growth in those eighteen years, and joined the little town to its quiet village neighbour, Chalkburne, the solid grey tower of which looked down as usual from its centuries of grey calm on the fitful stir and fret around it, and the fevered hopes and fears that must end at last in the quiet green mounds at its feet. And now at last the hill beyond Chalkburne was climbed; they were on the white chalk road that wound along by the downs. There were the woods of Swaynestone in the distance, and beyond them the unseen tower of Malbourne Church, and beneath that the Rectory, with its long-buried treasure of love and hope and trust.

The little bays along the coast shone in azure calm, and showed the silver gleam of a sail here and there; the woods spread their fresh green domes towards the sea; the scent of mown grass filled the air, and the brown-armed haymakers were busy in the meadows. It was all so familiar, and yet so strange to his prison-worn eyes.

Now they passed Swaynestone, where Sir Lionel reigned no more, having been gathered to his fathers; and there, on the left, stood the sham Greek Temple, its colonnade gleaming white in the sunlight, and its architrave sharply outlined against the fatal green coppice cresting the hill behind it. Everard could not see this spot, the source of so much misery, without a shudder, nor could the tenderer associations of his walk there with Lilian efface the horror of it from his mind.

And now that too was left behind, and there were only a few fields between him and Malbourne, and his pulses throbbed. All these pleasant home scenes were the same as in the old times, only the eyes which looked upon them were changed. Not a homestead or cottage was removed; there were no new buildings. The workshops of the wheelwright were now in sight. He could see a man in a paper cap hammering in its dark interior; then the cottage, with its wicket opening on to the road, and its two lime-trees arching over the path in front of the porch; then the yard, cumbered with a litter of timber and broken-down waggons, the scene of endless games with Cyril and the wheelwright's boys; and then the corner was turned, and the well-known village street, with the square, grey tower at the end, lay before him.

He stopped at the Sun, to leave his portmanteau. He felt that he could not go on; a sudden horror overwhelmed him at the sight of the home he had left so different a being, and all the degradation and suffering of those eighteen years seemed to rise up and stand between him and the woman for whom he had dreamed so different a destiny. He had pictured this moment so often in the solitude of his cell, and dwelt with such rapture upon his reunion with Lilian as the end of all that bitter misery, that he had not thought of the terrible change time and suffering had wrought in him till now, when it rushed in upon him like a flood.

Love never grows old; the lover is always the same within, and Everard's mental pictures of Lilian and himself always portrayed them both in the flower of youth, and were filled with youth's tender glamour. Perhaps he even thought unconsciously that their meeting would efface the ravages of those weary years from his life, with all that was sorrowful and distressing.

And now he stood within sight of the roof that sheltered her,

face to face with the sorrowful fact that youth had vanished for ever, and that the best part of the life they should have spent together was gone beyond recall. Only the fragments of life remained now—only the wrecks and floating spars of his own ship of life and of Lilian's.

He now remembered that she too must have changed. Her youth was also gone; incredible as it appeared, she too had suffered and borne the weight of sorrow-laden years. What if they should not be able to recognize each other? What if each found a stranger in the place of the beloved? Would not their meeting be too severe a test for human constancy?

Shaken by these half-morbid thoughts, the broken man entered the little hostelry, and, taking pen and ink, wrote to apprise Lilian of his arrival, and to appoint an hour for calling at the Rectory; for he felt that he could not go there unexpectedly, and drop in like a chance visitor, with the possibility of seeing her for the first time in public. He wished also to warn her that she must not expect to see the Henry of old days again, but only the shattered wreck of a man who had long left youth and hope behind.

Having despatched the note, he sat down and waited in the little parlour assigned him, in a state of tense excitement, which made the slightest sound, the ticking of a clock, the sound of wheel or hoof on the road, unbearable.

At last he sprang up and passed through the open French window into the old-fashioned cottage garden, where stood a rude summer-house, with a table and wooden settles, in which the village parliament was often held on summer evenings. A side-window of the bar gave upon the garden, and, pacing restlessly up and down the flagged path, Everard heard through the casement, which stood open to the summer air, the familiar twang of the local dialect borne by rustic voices upon his ear.

He glanced in as he passed, and recognized a face or two through all the mists and shadows of those years. George Straun, the burly blacksmith, stood as sturdy as ever, though his hair was now well powdered by the hand of Time. He recognized Stevens, the clerk, the years having altered his outward man but little, though they had made him more garrulous and opinionated than ever.

"Ay, Jarge Straun," he was saying, "there's a vine weight of grass hereabouts, zure-*ly*. I don't mind a heavier crop as I knows on this twenty year. Athout 'twas the year Ben Lee come by 's death."

"I minds that there crop," returned William Grove, whom Everard had not recognized—"well I minds 'un. That there spring there was a power o' hrain come down."

"And a vine zummer as ever I zee," added Stevens, "and the graves as easy to dig as easy; the sile entirely crumbed up wi' the drought, a did. And the grass was well zaved. Granfer, 'ee zaid as how 'ee didn't mind more'n dree or vour zummers like he all's life, Granfer didn't. That was the zummer ater Dr. Everard done for por Ben Lee—ay, that 'twas."

"Ah!" growled the blacksmith, withdrawing his broad face from the eclipse of his pewter pot, and passing his hand slowly over his mouth, "he never done that, Dr. Everard didn't."

"Zo you zays, Jarge Straun. And zay it you med till you was black i' the vaäce, but you wouldn't vetch 'un out o' jail," retorted Stevens, resuming a battle that had raged incessantly for the last eighteen years between the village worthies, whom the question had split into two unequal factions.

"I zeen 'un myself," continued Straun, leader of the not-guilty faction, "a-gwine down street in the vull daylight. And he hadn't no grey clo'es on. 'S coat was so black as my hat. Well I minds 'un! Passed the time o' day, he did, and looked as pleased as Punch. He never done vur Ben Lee, bless ye!"

"You be ter'ble clever, Jarge Straun; but you never kep' 'un out o' jail wi' all yer cleverness," said Stevens. "You never zeen no black coat that arternoon, 'thout 'twas yer own. Why, Lard love ye, I zeen 'un myself, as I zaid avore the justices. He come out o' Rectory gairden, and went up vield wi' 's grey clo'es on. He couldn't 'a been in two places at a time, nor he couldn't 'a wore two coats at a time, ye noghead. I zeen 'un 's plain as plums, I tell 'ee. I passes 'un the time o' day, and he never zeemed to hear and never zaid nothun. Vur why? He was a-gwine out a breakin' the Ten Commandments, a murderin' o' poor Ben Lee."

"He never done it," reiterated the blacksmith, stolidly.

"Not he didn't," added William Grove. "He zeen my little maid and give her a penny, and she've a got 'un now."

"And he zeen Granfer at vive o'clack, when them maids swore they zeen him come home in 's grey clo'es," added Hale, the wheelwright. "And he ast Granfer if he'd a yeard the bell-team go by, he did. And Granfer he up and zays, 'I ain't a yeard 'un go by zince dinner-time, not as I knows on, I ain't,' he zays, zays Granfer. And Dr. Everard, he zays a power o' things to Granfer—many a time Granfer have a zaid it in this yer Sun Inn—a power o' things Dr. Everard zaid, and a power o' things Granfer zaid to he. And Dr. Everard, he outs wi' a shil'n' and gives it to Granfer. And he keeps that there shil'n' to 's dying day, Granfer does. And there ain't a man in this yer bar but have zeen that

ar shil'n' and a-handled 'un," he concluded, triumphantly looking round with the sense of having finally clinched his argument.

"Ay, William Hale," returned Stevens, sarcastically, "you've got a power o' words inzide o' ye, when zo be as you can zim to bring 'em out. But Zir Ingram, he zeen 'un a-runnin' across that ar vield just avore vive. Ay, it's a likely thing as Zir Ingram shouldn't know if he zeen a man or a mouse. The likes o' he don't goo a swearin' they zeen what they never zeen. Granfer—I won't zay nothin' agen he—he'd a powerful mind, had Granfer, but, Lard love ye, what's a powerful mind agen a eddication like Sir Ingram's? Granfer, he'd a giv' his mind to most things, but he hadn't had no booklarning, zo to say, hadn't Granfer. He could count, and he could read print wi' leavin' out the big words, zo well as any man I knows on, but 's eddication was effective; it didn't come up to Sir Ingram's college scholarding, it didn't. Naw, naw."

A pause ensued, the little company feeling crushed by the weight of Stevens's long words, a species of powerful artillery that he only brought to bear on his adversary when hard pressed. Then Tom Hale, who some time ere this had beaten his sword into a wheelwright's tools, took up his parable on this wise:

"He never done it, Dr. Everard didn't."

"If he never done it, who did?" inquired the landlord, pertinently.

"Darn it all!" said William Grove, driving his hand through his bushy hair in dire perplexity, and repeating the phrase he had used any time these eighteen years, "zomebody done it. Why, I vound the body meself! Well I minds it. 'Twas a vrosty night, and I vound 'un all stiff and stark. Nobody can't zay nothin' agen that, when I zeen 'un wi' my own eyes. And I run into Master Hale's, as was keepin' up New Year's Eve wi' a party, and I zays, and you yeard me plain enough, 'Lord 'a massy on us!' I zays, zays I, 'they ben and done vur poor Ben Lee!' I zays; and Granfer, he yeard me."

"Ay, and Granfer he ups and zays, zays he, 'You med all mark my words,' he zays, 'zomebody'll ha'e to swing fur this yer.' Them was Granfer's words," said the wheelwright, looking round with great solemnity.

"Zomebody done it," continued Stevens, with authority; "and if 'twasn't Dr. Everard, who was it as done it? Athout 'twas Mr. Maitland hisself," he added, with intense sarcasm, "or maybe Mr. Cyril. Zomebody done it, that's as plain as plums."

"He never done it," repeated the sturdy blacksmith, finishing

his ale and stamping off homewards with a sullen "Good night" to all.

"There was Alma Lee," continued the landlord, who never liked a good argument conducing to the dryness of the inner man to drop, "she knowed who done it. And she sweared dead agen the doctor, she did."

"And she med swear," commented William Grove; "she was a bad 'un. Them there stuck-up gals isn't never up to no good. Mr. Maitland, and they up Rectory, they had the sp'ilin' o' she."

"Ay!" growled the wheelwright; "poor Charlie Judkins! What he took out to 'Merriky wi' 'un warn't no account, nohow."

"A baddish cargo 'twas," added Tom Hale; and the whole company joined in condemning the unfortunate girl with the wholesale condemnation dealt out by men to the woman who makes the smallest slip on the slippery path of right.

Just then the dear old familiar voice of the church clock told the hour, sending a quiver through Everard's frame with every stroke of its mellow bell; and, passing through the garden gate into the village street, he bent his steps towards the Rectory.

CHAPTER VI.

Every feature of the well remembered scene was the same, only the faces of the people were altered. Men were working in their little gardens, women standing at wicket gates with babies in their arms, children playing in the dusty road. The forge was all aglow, its furnace showing lurid red in contrast with the evening sunbeams. Straun's eldest son, a stout fellow over thirty, was dealing his ringing blows upon the anvil, in the cheery familiar rhythm of his craft.

The little band of children who always cluster about a forge were sporting round it, and turned to stare at the stranger. A tiny creature tottered away from its child-nurse, and stood open-armed in Everard's path, greeting him with a joyous gurgle. He patted the flaxen head, and passed on with a kind word. He was glad to see children run to him with confidence.

Every step on the familiar path made his heart beat more wildly. Something was rising chokingly in his throat, so that he was afraid to trust himself further on, and paused, leaning against the churchyard wall, behind which he could see the inscription on Granfer's tombstone, and imagined that he saw female figures

emerging from the Rectory gate or strolling under the trees, and asked himself, "Is it she?"

It was no fancy. A tangible, solid woman's form was indeed pacing, heavily pacing, the gravel drive; the form was stout, the hair iron-grey, the gait clumsy. A sick fear took him, and he remembered that Lilian was five and twenty eighteen long years ago. The lady opened the gate and issued forth, her features showing distinctly in the rich sunlight. They were heavy, commonplace, and quietly contented, and he did not recognize the once-pretty Miss Garrett of Northover, now the mother of half a dozen stout lads.

He recovered from this miserable, nervous weakness, and walked stoutly on, growing paler as he approached the beloved house. It was a delicious evening. The air was still and pure, and balmy with the scent of flowers and hay; the long sunbeams touched the woods and downs with tender glory; the swallows were darting round the tower, whose grey face was gilded by the western glow, and glancing across the pure, pale sky, their bodies gleaming with gold, like the doves of Scripture, "whose feathers are like gold;" down in the thickets the thrushes and blackbirds were pouring out their evening lay; and a pair of larks were maddening each other with the rival raptures of their song overhead.

He passed the bit of green on which Lennie and Dickie Stevens were fighting on the winter afternoon when he left it, handcuffed and amazed. He opened the gate and entered. There was the laburnum planted on the birthday, a great tree now; down there they used to play at Robinson Crusoe. The great pear-tree was still standing from which Cyril fell that far-off autumn day; he could even now see the boy lying white and still on the grass, hear Lilian's cry of terror, and recall the sick pang with which he thought he might be killed.

He reached the door, and a mist came before his eyes, whirling so that he could not see the bell-handle for a few seconds, and had to grope for it. The bell echoed through a silent house; he heard footsteps coming along the well-known corridor and through the hall; the door opened, and disclosed the blooming face of a parlour-maid, who regarded him without interest.

"Is Miss Maitland at home?" he asked, in a voice from which every vestige of tone had vanished.

"Yes, sir. What name, if you please?"

"Dr. Everard," he faltered huskily, and a terror came over him, and made him think that he should have to turn back, unable to face the moment.

The maid, however, whisked airily on to the drawing-room

door, which she opened, pronouncing his name with metallic clearness.

In the well-known room all seemed dark after the bright external sunshine. The Venetians were closed against the western glow, and the deep gloom was emphasized here and there by a long rod of golden light falling through the chinks. He stood irresolute just within the door. A figure rose from the far end, and he heard, in Lilian's pure and silvery tones, one cry of "Henry;" as she moved towards him.

For a space he seemed both blind and deaf, and then all the painful agitation fell away from him, the sick yearning of the long years was stilled, the nervous-weakness gone. He was healed and calmed, himself once more; for it was indeed Lilian who stood before him—the same, same Lilian, with the sweetest soul that ever looked from clear eyes gazing up into his own, the Lilian of his young love, the Lilian of his long, pining prison-dreams.

Those first few moments were too tense for memory; neither of the reunited lovers was ever able to recall anything but a dreamlike sense of happiness from them; each spoke, but neither remembered what was said. The first moment of distinct daylight consciousness was when they found themselves sitting hand-in-hand on the couch which had been Mrs. Maitland's through so many years of weakness, silent and happy and perfectly calm.

Everard was wholly pervaded by a sense of Lilian's pure and wholesome presence; he was soothed and blessed by it, as one is by the beauty of some fresh and fair summer evening, when the whole earth is bathed in the purity of soft and cloudless light, and the stainless air is stilled as if to listen to the voices of the sea and the forest and the bridal songs of many birds. Such had always been the effect of her presence. It had ever brought him renewed and fresh strength, together with the calm of perfect happiness; but now, after the long abstinence, the eighteen years' fast, the effect was tenfold.

They sat a long time thus, forgetful of everything but the divine rapture of that long desired moment, forgetful of all the wrong and misery, the sin and degradation and loss of the weary years that had parted them, forgetful of every creature but each other; and then Lilian began to speak of those he had loved, and at last rose from the pleasant shadows and went to the bay window.

"It is dark," she said, in the beloved remembered voice; "we will have light."

And in a moment she had drawn up the rattling Venetian blind, and the full blaze of evening sunshine poured in upon her. It crowned her rich hair with new glory, it fell like a benediction

upon her calm brow and finely curved lips, it clothed her form with a robe of radiance, as she stood erect and well-poised in the perfection of grace that is only possible to a form of beautiful proportions, her head slightly thrown back, her glance raised to the glowing sky, and one arm, from which the lace fell backwards, extended in the act of drawing the cord. She stood in the magic glow transfigured, exalted by the deep emotion of the moment, and wearing, in Everard's eyes, a brighter glory than that of youth.

There had ever been in Lilian an enduring charm over which years could have no power—a something so superior to beauty that it made people forget to ask if that divine gift were hers, and which also made it impossible to think of age or youth in connection with her. Though it was well known that the dean was her twin-brother, no one ever dreamed of attributing his three and forty years to her; nor did any one commit the mistake of treating her as a girl. She did not grow old or fade; she simply developed in so harmonious a manner that each year of her life seemed the year of culminating prime.

A minute and microscopic examination of her features might have enabled a physiologist to assign her the true tale of her years; there might have been grey hairs among the brown, soft waves, but no one sought them, and no one saw them. Health and exercise had preserved the fair proportions of her form; no evil thought had stamped its impress on the pure outline of her features; no fretting, no repressed and baffled faculties had left their wearing marks on her beautiful face.

Good women age slowly, as great painters discovered when painting bereaved Madonnas. Women whose lives are full and whose faculties are fully employed also age slowly. Lilian's life had by no means been sterile. She had had her mother, whose life her cares had prolonged, to nurse; her young brother and sister to bring up; her father and her home to care for; the whole village, and all the invalids and ne'er-do-wells for miles round, to cherish and advise and heal.

With an intellect less showy, but stronger and steadier than the dean's, she had given him all that was best and most enduring in his writings; no work of his had ever been passed through the press without the benefit of her revision; there were few things he had ever done without her advice, in spite of the estrangement that had arisen between them since the date of their common sorrow. She had been with him in his bereavements, and had tended the death-beds of his children and his wife; and she had been a mother to Marion and the blind Everard, who both loved her next to their father.

And, deep as was the sorrow which had made her youth a loneliness, and blighted Everard's hopes and her own in this long and terrible punishment, it was the kind of sorrow that purifies and elevates: it was not like the physical suffering, the degradation, and the wearing sense of wrong which Everard endured; it could not crush her energies, blunt her faculties, or stifle her intellect. She had not been obliged to repress the love so cruelly blighted; she had lived for Everard all those years, and had been able to keep alive hope, and even some kind of joy, in his breast. The sorrow had come so suddenly, and fallen so irrevocably, that there had been no wearing agony of suspense, no struggle of hopes and fears; the trouble had to be met and coped with once for all, and through the dim vista of those long years there had always gleamed the hope that was fulfilled in the present moment.

Everard gazed in rapt admiration on the glorified figure in the sunshine and upon the well-remembered adored hand that was so like a spirit in its pure and slender beauty, and did not dream of helping her, it was so long since he had known the courtesies of life. She had only raised the centre blind of the bay; she now turned to the side blinds, and drew them up with the same light and strong sweep of her well-moulded arm, and Everard now observed that she was in an evening dress of some light-hued and soft fabric, and wore a bunch of fresh roses at her neck: she was in festal array to receive him. The golden glory changed even as she stood, it blushed a sudden crimson, and died away into purest rose; the sun set, and only the faint and changing after-glow remained.

Lilian now turned and saw Everard clearly in the fading rose-light, which vanished as she looked, and left only the hard, uncompromising light of a June evening behind. She saw the wistful eyes deep-sunken in the wasted face, the grey hair, the bowed form, and the worn and haggard features, with their sublime expression of heroic suffering, and a sharp, plaintive cry broke from her.

"Henry! my poor, poor Henry! What have they done to you?" she cried, hastening to his side.

He rose to meet her, and clasped the beautiful slim hands in his own gloved ones, and looked down into her tear-clouded eyes. "I warned you what a wreck you would see," he replied. "Ah, Lilian! this is not the man you loved."

"Dearest, you must be happy now; you must forget all the trouble and pain," continued Lilian, who was crying for very pity over him. "Ah, Henry! if love could heal you, you would soon be healed."

Henry could only fold her silently to his heart, feeling that he was indeed healed already.

Soon Mr. Maitland appeared, his silver hair now snow-white, and his voice fainter than of old. He was much shocked at the change in Henry at first sight of him; but he recovered quickly, and welcomed him cordially in the exquisite Maitland manner. His first full conviction of Everard's guilt had gradually disappeared, whether under the influence of Lilian's long unswerving faith, or of the tone of Henry's letters, which had of late often been quoted to him, or through the softening which old age brings, and which disposes to increasing lenience of judgment, it is difficult to say. He now asked his forgiveness for his former want of faith in him.

"Dear fellow," he said, "I yield Lilian willingly to you, hard as it is to lose her. But you have the better claim, and you have waited long; my poor children, you have waited too long," he added, his eyes growing dim as they fell on Everard's grey hairs.

He would not hear of Everard's leaving the house that night, but sent at once for his portmanteau, and told him that his room had been waiting for him for days.

"I should rather say your rooms," he explained, "since Lilian could not decide whether you would prefer your own old room, or one less familiar, and thus had two arranged. But why do you keep your gloves on? You were wont to despise gloves in the old days."

"Can you not guess?" asked Everard. "Did you ever see a mason's hands?"

"Shall it be the old room?" asked Lilian, while her father turned away more moved at the thought of the roughened hands than he had thought it possible to be, and remembering Everard's intellectual gifts, and the rich promise of his early manhood.

Everard's had been the ideal surgeon's hand—strong, supple, smooth, and with sensitive finger-tips, and this skilful and scientific instrument had been blunted and maimed by rough mechanic labour through all the best years of his life, while many a sufferer had lacked its healing touch, and writhed under the clumsier strength of less delicate fingers.

"Alas, Henry!" he exclaimed, after a pause; "I trust I may never know the man who let you suffer in his stead. I could not forgive him."

A faint shudder passed over Lilian at these words, and she directed Henry's attention to a cushioned chair by the hearth, on which lay a round, black something, which proved on inspection to be Mark Antony, the cat, sleeping the sleep of the just, and noring blissfully.

"Dear old Mark!" said Henry, stroking the velvet fur; "what, alive still?"

"He has retired from active service," observed Mr. Maitland, "and devotes himself to a life of contemplation—lazy old Mark!"

"He is the apple of our eyes," laughed Lilian, lifting him up, and letting him stretch his soft limbs and yawn blissfully. "I love the creature as if he were human; he has been my companion and comfort so long."

Mr. Maitland observed that, like many other gentlemen, Mark had taken to religion in his later years, and was now a regular church-goer. Every Sunday morning he was in the habit of trotting after his master to the vestry, where he had a cushion in a sunny window-sill, and was respectfully treated by the clerk and the choristers.

These trivial anecdotes, which served to fill an awkward silence, presently included Cyril.

"We are very proud of 'my son the dean,' Henry, you must know; our Chrysostom, our golden-mouth. You must hear him preach some day," Mr. Maitland said finally.

"Poor Cyril!" sighed Everard. "I stopped at Belminster on my way down, and heard him preach. A very fine preacher, with a singular gift. I do not wonder that you are proud of him."

"You saw Cyril?" asked Lilian, with a startled air.

"He does not often preach," continued Mr. Maitland. "The fact is, his nerves cannot stand the excitement; he throws himself too unrestrainedly into it, and it makes him ill."

"He was ill that night. Yes, I saw that he was completely carried away. He is inspired; he is obliged to speak as he is moved. He said what he never dreamed of saying before he began."

"Our dear Chrysostom!" murmured the proud father. "Yes, Henry, the fire descends upon him; he has the true gift. Have you heard that he is to be Bishop of Warham?"

"Poor Cyril!" said Henry and Lilian simultaneously; and neither asked the other why he was to be pitied.

But Lilian seemed anxious to avoid the topic, and, saying that the supper-hour was already past, led the way into the dining-room, with the great cat.

"Puss gives me such a sense of home as I cannot express," said Henry, fondly stroking his unresponsive form.

"We think his purr acquires mellowness with years," laughed Lilian. "Henry, do you still like chicken and oysters and cherry-tart? Because I have dreamed for years of giving them to you on such an occasion as this."

"And this pale port?" added Mr. Maitland, pointing to a cobwebbed bottle lying on a rack. "You and Cyril laid it down for me. It was drunk at his ordination, his wedding, his eldest son's christening, and his installation as dean. This was kept for your return, and there is still a botttle for the bishop's enthronement."

"They did not give us very old port or young chicken at Dart——" Henry began, and stopped, seeing Lilian glance at the waiting-maid. He flushed, but was too serenely happy for any morbid regrets, and listened happily to his host's apology for the absence of dinner, which was now only a midday repast, owing to the declining health of his old age.

Lilian's remembrance of his old liking touched him as only such little things can touch, and the meal with the old port had almost a sacramental character for him. The sparkle of the silver and glass, the ordinary graces of a gentleman's table, to which he had so long been a stranger, were beyond measure delightful to him, and he saw by many little indications that the fresh flowers and the fruit and the very service, had received the graceful touch of Lilian's own hands to welcome him.

His last free meal had been at that board and in that beloved presence. Since then, save for the few solitary repasts he had taken in hotels, he had broken the bread of captivity moistened with tears, and had learned almost to forget the simple courtesies of life. It was a pleasure to drink from bright engraved glass, to handle silver and fresh linen, to hear the kindly voice of his host, to observe the quiet, gliding motions of the well-trained maid, to see the soft glow of the lamp; much more to feel the beloved presence, to meet the glance of Lilian's clear eyes, and hear the pure tones of her voice. It was like heaven, he said, when they parted for the night.

CHAPTER VII.

THE next day was Sunday, and Everard, like one in a blissful dream, went to the church so full of youthful associations, and saw many of the faces familiar to his youth, yet unfamiliar now because of the metamorphoses of time, and missed many, swept away, for the most part, into the silence which awaits us all, and thought of the winter Sunday eighteen years agone, when Cyril preached his strange, passionate sermon on innocence. He

thought, too, of the sermon in the cathedral, and the terrible anguish on the guilty man's face, the canker that had been eating into his heart through all those years. He was glad to think that Marion was at rest.

Upon the wall, opposite the Rectory pew, he saw a marble tablet, on which he read the following sorrowful inscription :—

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF
MARION,
BELOVED WIFE OF
THE VERY REVEREND CYRIL MAITLAND, D.D.,
DEAN OF BELMINSTER,
WHO DIED AUGUST 20, 1875,
AGED 32 YEARS.

AND OF
THE BELOVED CHILDREN OF THE ABOVE:
ERNEST, AGED 6 YEARS;
ARTHUR AND LILIAN, AGED 3 YEARS;
CYRIL EVERARD, AGED 9, BERTHA, AGED 3,
AND WILLIAM KEPPEL, AGED 4, WHO ALL THREE DIED IN ONE
WEEK OF THE SAME MALADY;
AND EDWARD AUGUSTUS, AGED 1 YEAR.

"O spare me a little, that I may recover my strength: before I go hence, and be no more seen."

A vision of the little band of children floated with pathetic grace before Everard's eyes, and he thought what pangs must have rent their parents' hearts when the earth closed over each bright little face; nor did he greatly wonder that Marion's fragile existence had been crushed by such sorrow. The boy who had given him the *bon-bons* and played at convicts headed the mournful list, a pretty, sturdy little fellow, whose name and features he remembered well. His heart bled for Cyril, and yet he thought and wondered, did Lilian think too, as she sat by his side, of another little group of child-faces—of other Cyrils and Lilians and Ernests, of the very same blood as those dead babes, who might have clustered around their hearth but for that stricken father's sin? He thought also of yet another child, outcast and disowned, who might be wandering now in lonely manhood somewhere on the earth's wide bosom.

Lilian had told him of the sad manner in which Cyril's twins were lost. They were at play on the steps of a bathing-machine,

drawn up by a rope on a sloping shore, when the line parted, and the machine ran down into the sea, Cyril running after it with all his speed, and suffering the cruel anguish of seeing the children spring towards him only to fall in the sea, where the rollers at once swept them away from his sight for ever. His wild effort to save them had thus caused their death.

Marion felt it less than Cyril, who was an unusually affectionate father, Lilian said. Indeed, Marion had been strangely apathetic of late years. Her marriage was not a happy one. She could not understand her husband, she confessed to Lilian in her last hours; he was kind, and even tender, towards her, but she was afraid of him, and grew more afraid as years went on. There was something—she knew not what—between them, and Cyril's strange and terrible melancholy was enough to depress a stronger nature than hers.

"I have sometimes thought," commented Lilian, "that Marion's continual bereavements and fragile health may have unhinged her mind; there was certainly something morbid in the way in which she thought of Cyril." There was a wistful appeal in Lilian's voice as she said this, and an expression in the eyes which she lifted to Everard's that made him shiver inwardly.

"I think," he replied gently, "that their characters were unsuited to each other. Cyril needed a wife of stronger intellect, and Marion a man of less complex character, whom she could have understood and appreciated. You know, I always said that her health would give way under unhappiness: she needed the gentlest cherishing. And she is at rest now, Lilian, and it is well with her," he added, with a faint tremble in his voice. "I urged the marriage because I knew that the disappointment would kill her."

They were sitting in the bay of the drawing-room window during this conversation, the bells were dropping their slow chime, laden with memories, into Everard's heart and ears, and people were walking churchwards in little groups through the lane at the bottom of the garden. Then the drawing-room door opened suddenly, and, with a rustle of silk and a glow of fine raiment, a most beautiful young lady entered unannounced, and embraced Everard in a rapturous manner, calling him her dear Henry, and saying how delighted she was to see him again, and how she should have known him anywhere.

"This is very agreeable," he replied, recovering himself, "but rather embarrassing."

"But don't you know me, Henry?" she cried.

"Have you forgotten Winnie?" asked Lilian.

"And here is my husband. Surely you remember him?" said Winnie, turning to Sir Ingram Swaynestone, who had followed her in, with a fair-haired child in his hand, and who was a much more portly and imposing personage than he had been eighteen years ago.

Ingram thought that the homicide, by whomsoever committed, had at least been unintentional. He could not refuse this meeting without paining the sisters, which he was too good-natured to do. He therefore tried to make the best of it.

"I am inclined to believe that there was some mistake in that business of poor Lee's," he said, after greeting Henry, "though it is hard to doubt the evidence of one's senses. I hope, Dr. Everard, we shall be able to forget the parts we had to play then."

"I hope so," replied Everard, feeling that Swaynestone could not meet him without some such concession, but seeing very plainly that he did not doubt the evidence of his senses.

"This is our daughter Lilian," Sir Ingram added, thus ending a rather embarrassing pause, bidding the child go and shake hands, which she stoutly refused to do.

"Naughty little thing! Her father spoils her shamefully," said Winnie; "simply for the sake of her name, I believe. But little girls who won't shake hands with gentlemen will never be like Aunt Lilian," she added severely.

"And where is Lionel?" asked Lilian, taking the child on her knee. "Is he not going to church?"

"Master Lionel was not in a devout frame of mind this morning," replied his father. "When requested to indue his go-to-meeting clothes, he threw himself on the ground and roared with the vigour of ten boys, so, of course, he had his way. Can you imagine who spoils Lion, Aunt Lilian?"

"Poor darling!" said Lady Swaynestone; "I am sure he is not well. His nervous system is so quickly upset."

"Me don't like him hands," observed little Lilian at this juncture, pointing to Henry's hands; but, with the waywardness of her age, she was struck at the same moment by the expression of his face, and climbed on his knee with the utmost confidence.

"By the way, we had a letter from the Very Reverend yesterday," said Winnie. "He wrote very hurriedly in answer to a business letter of Ingram's, but he said that Lennie's ship is coming home with the squadron; also that the rumour of his engagement to that girl at Malta is well founded, so we suppose there will be a Mrs. Lennie before long."

"Father and I have long been prepared to receive the girl at Malta," Lilian said; and she opened an album, and showed Everard

the photograph of a fine young naval officer, whom he recognized as his old playfellow Lennie.

They were setting off for the church, when a lady, dressed in a conventual garb, entered the gate and came to meet them.

"I am quite disappointed," she said, with a smile that brought back old times to Everard; "I wanted to be the first to meet Dr Everard, and welcome him. I see that you have forgotten Ethel Swaynestone, Dr. Everard."

"I was not prepared for the dress," replied Everard, wondering at the bright flush which overspread her thin, delicate face; for he did not dream that the romance of her life owned him as its central figure.

"Dr. Everard has not yet seen the hospital, Ethel," said Lilian; and then it was explained to him that Lilian had caused two cottages to be built, one for convalescents and one for sick poor people, and had placed them under the charge of Miss Swaynestone's sisterhood, a sister from which always lived there, and, with help from Lilian, nursed the parish sick in their own homes or at the cottages.

"The question is, what does Lilian not do?" commented Sir Ingram. "She scolds all the drunkards and scamps; she arranges all the matrimonial squabbles—Winnie and I dare not for the life of us have a comfortable wrangle together; she exhorts the naughty children; she makes up the quarrels of sweethearts; she makes people's wills for them; she keeps an asylum for aged and useless beasts of every description; she engages servants that nobody else can put up with, and turns them out marvels of perfection; she entertains dipsomaniacs and other bad characters at the Rectory, and sends them back candidates for canonization; she tames unruly animals for miles round, and heals sick ones; nobody ever dreams of getting married or born, or buying a field, or going to service, without first asking her advice;—in short, she is the most fearful busybody at large. And, to crown all, she insists on marrying a ticket-of-leave man," he added, within himself.

It was delicious to Everard to go through the old Sunday routine again, and think that this simple, quiet, wholesome life had been going on all through those weary prison years. There was Mr. Marvyn, the curate, who had instructed his youth, preaching the old familiar sermons, with their scraps of learning and difficult theological and ethical problems, which flew so far over the heads of the slumbering congregation; there was the harmonium, a little touched with asthma, and played, as of yore, by Mrs. Wax, who, with her husband, had survived all the changes, and gallantly faced all the requirements of new education codes;

there were the whole clan of Hales and Straun, and the discontented tailor, whose discontent was now silvered by the dignity of hoar hairs, and William Grove, and his mate Jem.

Joe Stubbs, the chorister whose levity had been publicly rebuked by his pastor, now sat among the basses, and thundered out deep chest-notes from beneath his white surplice, himself the parent of light-hearted boys and girls; Dicky Stevens, also a husband and father, sat near him, as of old, but led the tenors instead of the trebles, and sent his naughty boys to be tamed by the hand which had redeemed his own youth from the tyranny of the stick. In the afternoon, Mr. Maitland preached in the sweet, paternal, simple strain that had so impressed Everard's youth, with the beautiful Maitland voice and manner, and the pure diction he had loved.

It was easy to see whence the dean's great powers were derived; it was impossible not to think that talents as great, nay, perhaps in some respects greater, than his were buried in this humble little village. His son's sudden flights of inspiration were indeed wanting in the village priest's quiet eloquence, but his sermons had something that was lacking in the dean's—namely, the steady glow of a fervid and unaffected piety, which only aimed at making his hearers better men and women, and thought not of ambition and self. *Nunc Dimittis* was the good old gentleman's theme, and it filled Everard's heart with a beautiful peace. He did not know how appropriate it was to the occasion, since he did not dream that these were the last words the gentle priest was to say to his flock; nor did he dream that the sermon which he knew Cyril was then preaching before so different an audience in Belminster Cathedral was to be the last of the brilliant and soul-searching orations which had won him so lustrous a name.

"My children," said Mr. Maitland, in conclusion, "I beseech you to keep innocency; for that, and that alone, shall bring a man peace at the last." Strange echo of his son's first sermon in that church!

It had been whispered about that the broken, wistful-eyed man sitting in the Rectory pew was no other than the too-notorious Dr. Everard, whose trial and sentence were still so fresh in the village memory. Searching glances were directed upon him during afternoon sermon, and many eyes recognized the features of the handsome and hopeful young doctor under his wan and changed aspect, so that when Everard came forth into the afternoon sunshine, he was surprised to see a little lane formed about the churchyard path, and to find himself accosted by name.

There had from the first been a faction in the village convinced of Everard's innocence. It was the head of this faction who now spoke.

"Glad to see you back, sir," blurted out Straun, with a perspiring effort, as he took off his hat and held out his great hand. "We knowed you never done it."

"Ay, we knowed you never done it," chimed in William Grove, and some others, advancing also with outstretched hand. "Granfer, he knowed you never done it; and this here is Granfer's tombstone," added the shepherd who had seen Everard on his way to Widow Dove's on the fatal afternoon, bringing his hard hand down on the stone, as if its existence were a solid proof of Granfer's valuable opinion on the subject.

"And Widow Dove," said Tom Hale, the old soldier, "as her daughter married my wife's brother, as set up in the hardware line at Oldport, it lay on her conscience when she come to die, as she never said nothing about her fire being out that afternoon, and no candle, and the door shut, when you came up and thought the house empty. Many's the time she've spoke of that to my wife on her dying bed, as helped nurse her, and had it wrote in the family Bible."

"And my little gal, she minds now how you give her the penny that night," added William Grove, pushing forwards a bashful, buxom young woman, with a child in her arms, who curtseyed and blushed. "Growed up she is, and made a granfer of me, zure enough," her father added.

Everard could scarcely speak; he could only grasp each proffered hand and murmur some vague words of thanks, but his heart was deeply stirred as he passed along the lane of kindly, hearty faces, and went out into the road, where he found Farmer Long and his family, who were waiting to welcome him and express their sorrow at the unmerited calamity which had befallen him.

This little outburst on the part of the stolid, undemonstrative rustics was so unexpected, and so strong a proof of the feeling with which his innocence was regarded by some of his old friends, though not, as he well knew, by all, that it almost overpowered him, and he was glad to take refuge within the Rectory gate. On turning to shut it, he saw his friends still standing in the afternoon sunlight, with their hats off till he should have vanished from their sight, and he again removed his own.

He sat with Mr. Maitland and Lilian under the thick-leaved lime tree, silent and happy, watching the shadows turn soft and slant, and the swallows dart across the sunny blue, while the

father and daughter told him many things that had come to pass in his absence, and tea was brought out; and, finally, Mr. Maitland sank into the peaceful slumber which usually followed his Sunday labours. Then Lilian took the cat in her arms, and walked towards the field to visit her invalid animals.

"Why do you carry that great creature?" asked Everard. "Let me take him for you."

"As if Mark would suffer any one else to carry him!" laughed Lilian, as the cat, with an indignant look at Everard, clasped his fore paws round her neck, and rubbed his head against her cheek. "You cannot imagine how I love the thing, Henry; he is a link with the past. Do you remember the day we found him, a stray, half-starved kitten, up by Temple Copse? It was the Christmas vacation, and you and I and Cyril were talking about his chance of taking honours. How happy we were!"

"It was a frosty day," continued Everard, musingly, "and the kitten was numb with cold till you warmed it in your furs. Its bones were staring through its skin."

"And it has loved me ever since—me and Cyril only. Mark never forgets Cyril, but runs to him still," said Lilian, stroking the warm soft fur. "Only once did Mark make a mistake—on that fatal evening when he ran after the grey figure in the dusk, else he never ran after any human being but myself and Cyril. Was it not strange, Henry?" she added, finding that he made no comment.

"The whole occurrence was strange, dearest, and better forgotten," he replied evasively.

"Do you think it was an optical delusion?" she persisted, after some trivial and irrelevant remarks on the part of Everard, who wished to change the subject.

"No doubt it was; perhaps a light was reflected from some quarter by the opening of a door. Who knows? One is often deceived in the twilight, when everything is more or less ghostly. That old beech still stands. It will be down some stormy night."

"Cats are not deceived by the twilight," continued Lilian, with a tremor in her voice; "they see better in the dusk. Oh, Henry," she added, with a stifled cry, "there was but *one* the cat ever followed!"

She was trembling, and for the moment Everard paused with a blanched cheek, unable to say anything.

"You have brooded too long over this," he said at last, with a lame effort at lightness, "and your imagination creates bugbears from it. The cat probably saw or smelt a mouse, and ran after that. Or he may have been merely frisking about, as cats do, in

the dusk. Think no more of it, Lilian. Let us bury that troubled past for ever."

"It is not possible, Henry," she replied, still trembling. "Things that are branded into one can never be forgotten. Dear Henry, tell me one thing. Do you know who did that dreadful thing for which you suffered?"

"How should I know?" he returned, in a hard voice that he could not control. "I do not think it will be known, Lilian, till the day when all things are revealed. There is an impenetrable mystery about it. Let it remain. Why lift the veil?"

Lilian gazed earnestly upon his troubled and averted face, and then said, in low, thrilling tones, "Henry, you *know* who killed Benjamin Lee, and you know that the man who did it wore your clothes and passed up the staircase in the dusk that night."

Everard's heart stood still, and his temples throbbed. "Dear," he replied, "I do know who killed that poor man, but I do not wish to reveal it. I have known it for eighteen years, and have seen no cause for revealing it. Such knowledge would benefit no human being; it would inflict terrible suffering on some. Do not tempt me to break my silence, Lilian; it is a point of honour."

Lilian had dropped the cat on the grass, and was leaning against the light iron fence of the paddock. She now turned, and, clasping Everard's arm with convulsive force, looked imploringly in his face.

"Tell me," she cried, "tell me that it is not so—that I am mistaken; that it was a bad dream—an evil fancy! Say, oh, Henry, if you love me, say it was not *he!*"

She was sobbing now, and quivering all over in unspeakable agitation—she who was so calm and self-controlled usually. Henry drew her to him, and strove by caresses and words of love to soothe her, but was himself far too much agitated to be able to deceive her.

"Oh!" she cried, "I cannot, cannot bear it! My Cyril! my own brother! my poor, poor Cyril! I understand it all now."

"You know, dearest," said Everard at last, with grave, compassionate tenderness, "that nothing can happen without the will of God."

Lilian's sobs became quieter at these words, and after a time they ceased, and she lifted her head and looked back at the lime tree, beneath the shade of which they could see the white head of her sleeping father.

"There is one," said Henry, pointing to him, "who must never suspect."

"He never shall," replied Lilian, striving to regain her habitual self-command. "But oh, my poor, poor boy! Such awful hypo-

crisy. I *would* not suspect for a long time; it seemed like a temptation of the evil one. Not until Marion's death. I think she was afraid to let herself think. But she told me so much when she was dying. And Cyril—ah, Henry, he was always weak! But a traitor! oh, it seems incredible! Ah, what a dark and terrible mystery our nature is! And he let you suffer, you who loved him so! Oh, my Henry!"

"You know, Lilian," repeated Everard, in unutterable love and pity, "it was permitted by the Divine Will." And the words again had a quieting effect upon Lilian, who had now regained her serene charm of face and manner, inwardly torn as she was.

"And you saw him?" she asked. "How could he meet you? What could he say? Oh, how can he have lived this lie, and borne this awful burden all these years?"

"His burden was heavier than mine," Everard said; and then he described their meeting in the cathedral, Cyril's passionate sermon, his terrible agitation on recognizing him among the crowded congregation, and his own letter of forgiveness to the unhappy man.

But they each wondered that he had not yet answered the letter.

"Doubtless there will be an answer to-morrow," said Everard.

"And I must go to him and tell him that I know and pity all," said Lilian. "Yes, there will be an answer to-morrow."

But the answer never came.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was said that the pope, on being asked once if he knew anything of the Church of England, replied that he thought he remembered having heard something about an eloquent dean in that communion, named Maitland. Others told the story differently, and averred that it was Bishop Oliver who had conferred such lustre on the national Church.

The bishop himself, on being asked whom he considered the first preacher in the Church, had replied that Dean Maitland was undoubtedly the *second*, his interrogator divining, from a shrewd twinkle in the episcopal eye, that there would be a lack of delicacy in pressing him to name the first. The same querist, on putting a similar question to the dean, had been met by a genial smile, and the candid but laughing avowal that he had never heard any one compared to himself, unless it was the bishop; for the dean's

ingenuous, almost childlike, candour was not one of the least of his social charms.

The two ecclesiastics were rivals not only in the pulpit, but in the world. Both were favourites at Court and in general society; but the bishop lacked the personal beauty and grace of the dean, and, though a good talker and clever *raconteur*, and possessed of a fund of genuine humour, he had not the dean's bright, swift wit or his light and playful touch in conversation: his mirth, like his intellect, was elephantine in comparison with the pard-like gracefulness of the dean's. Nor did the bishop possess that rare and magnetic power of attracting and subjugating people's hearts peculiar to Cyril Maitland, and given to a few choice spirits destined to rule men.

His features were square, massive, and expressive of solid intellect, unvisited by the lightning flashes of emotion and thought which gave new beauty to the dean's beautiful face. Bishop Oliver was past middle age, and looked as if he had never been young, while the dean looked as if he could never be old. He was a good man, though human. In all the farthest recesses of his memory there was nothing he feared to look at; there was no spiritual tragedy in his life; he was unacquainted with the depths of human agony. Thus his sermons, though possessing a more level and sustained excellence than the dean's, though showing greater intellect and learning, had infinitely less power to touch men's hearts; nor was he ever carried away beyond the limits of his will, and thus enabled to carry others away, as the dean was. People did not fly to him for spiritual help, as they did to the dean, for he did not possess his absolute sympathy with the sinful; their lives and experiences differed so widely from his own spotless career, that he could not but regard them as aliens, strive as he would to call them brothers.

But there was something in Dean Maitland's way of regarding sin and sinners which opened the darkest recesses of people's hearts to him, and men had not feared to pour into his sympathizing ear things which it froze the blood to hear. Very tender was the healing hand he laid upon sick souls—tender but firm. No one knew better than he the remedies which alone can heal such deadly maladies, although, like many physicians of the body, he had not the strength of will to apply his prescriptions to his own case. Of this he was sometimes conscious, as was seen in his last sermon to candidates for ordination, when he had taken for text, "Lest I myself, when I have preached to others, should become a castaway."

Never for a moment let it be thought that sin is in any way

necessary or good or helpful, anything but vile and injurious in itself or in its far-reaching consequences; yet it is an undoubted fact that in some natures a heavy fall leads to a higher spiritual development. Good is stronger than evil, and the eternal purpose which rules in all things, and against which nothing human can prevail, often appears to bring the brightest light from the thickest darkness. Thus this man's black iniquity was made an instrument of healing to others.

The bishop's detractors accused him of worldliness and ambition, and said that he misapplied St. Paul's injunction, to be all things to all men, and was too good a courtier to be a good Christian.

It must be confessed that the bishop, being human as well as Christian, did greatly love the esteem of men, and particularly of princes, and in his heart of hearts felt it hard that he and the dean should have their lines cast in the same place, expressly, as it seemed to him, that the lustre of his own renown might be dimmed by the greater brilliance of his rival's. They were, however, the best of friends—for even the bishop was subjugated by the irresistible charm of his rival's manner whenever he came into personal contact with him—and had been heard to observe, after one of those slight differences of opinion that must sometimes arise between the bishop and the dean, that it was pleasanter to be at war with Dean Maitland than at peace with the majority of mankind. Yet it was said of Bishop Oliver that he managed never to be at war with mortal man, Jew or papist, churchman or dissenter, atheist or fanatic.

The dean's preferment to the see of Warham was at once a rose and a thorn to the bishop, a rose, because it would remove his rival to such a distance that he would no longer daily overshadow him; a thorn, because the see of Warham was of greater dignity and emolument than that of Belminster. Thus he regarded it with mixed feelings, and had been heard to say that from the deanery of Belminster to the episcopal throne of Warham was a singularly sudden leap.

Not that Bishop Oliver for a moment accused himself of so mean a thing as jealousy; he imagined himself to be actuated solely by deep solicitude for the weal of Church and State, which he sincerely thought himself better calculated to serve than the dean. But when, on the Sunday following the dean's illness in the pulpit, the bishop was sitting tranquilly at luncheon, he was greatly discomposed by an observation from one of his young people, to the effect that the premier was coming down to Belminster that very afternoon for the express purpose, it was said,

though this was not the case, since the minister chanced to be passing a Sunday at Dewhurst Castle, of hearing the bishop-designate preach.

"Nonsense, my dear Mabel!" he said. "Ministers have something better to do than to be running about after popular preachers, particularly while Parliament is in session."

A young clergyman present passed his napkin before his face to conceal an irrepressible smile, and remembered how differently the bishop had spoken of people who came to hear *him* preach.

"Well, my dear father, I can only regret the levity of Mr. Chadwell's disposition," returned Mabel, "for he certainly telegraphed last night to know if the dean was to preach this afternoon."

"I thought," returned the bishop, "that his recovery was singularly rapid. He was very ill on Friday. It is a great pity that he should excite himself so much; he will kill himself one of these days. And that kind of sermon does no permanent good."

"By the way, sir," said a son, "there is a queer story about the dean. Some woman who died at the hospital last week accused him of all manner of goings-on with her last breath, I hear."

"Tittle-tattle, Herbert; nothing more. Local celebrities are always the centres of scandalous report."

"The fierce light that beats upon a deanery," laughed the young fellow. "Well, these were strange doings for a dean, I must say."

The bishop adroitly started a fresh topic, but he could not help reflecting in his heart of hearts that the doings attributed to the dean by the half-uttered, half-suppressed rumours he knew to be flying about, were indeed remarkably strange. For Alma's dying statement had not been made in private; the dean's delay and her own extremity had rendered her desperate, and her one desire was that the injustice done Everard should be known. He could not help reflecting, moreover, that there was probably some foundation for the rumours, however slight, and he felt that he should not be struck dumb with surprise if he learnt that the brilliant and handsome ecclesiastic had sown a few wild oats in his hot youth, and bitterly repented the harvest such sowing always entails. He had often wondered at the power and passion with which he depicted feelings of remorse; yet he was destined to be greatly surprised that afternoon.

The cathedral was crowded. People sat on the choir steps and filled the nave to the farthest limits of hearing; chairs were placed north and south of the choir; the choir itself was as full as its stately decorum permitted. The well-known face of the

premier was seen among the worshippers. This gentleman intended calling at the Deanery after the service, and had sent an intimation to that effect.

The dean smiled rather grimly when he heard who was to be his guest that afternoon, and speedily quieted the agitation into which Miss Mackenzie was always thrown at the prospect of visits from people of distinction. "You need not get out the best china," he said, with his old playful way of alluding to stock jests; "I promise you that the minister will not come."

He was going to the cathedral, manuscript in hand, as he spoke. He turned back again, and met Miss Mackenzie descending the stairs, dressed ready for the cathedral, and she observed that he was paler than ever, and grave as he had been since his seizure on the Friday night.

"Dear Miss Mackenzie," he said, in his sweetest way, "I have a little favour to ask you."

He paused, and Miss Mackenzie began, "Oh, Mr. Dean, anything I can do——" for she, like everybody else, felt that the dean conferred a favour in asking one.

"You have been a good friend," he continued, "and I owe much of the peace and comfort of my home to you."

"And what do I not owe to you?" she replied, with enthusiasm. "How happy I have been here!"

"I hope, indeed, that you have been happy under my roof," he went on. "I should be grieved if it were otherwise, for I am not all bad. I only want you, Miss Mackenzie, to do me the slight favour of staying at home this afternoon."

Then he turned and went, leaving the gentlewoman rooted to the ground with surprise until he reached the door, when he again turned and wished her good-bye in a voice that she never forgot. Reflecting on this little incident afterwards, she regarded it as a strong proof of the solid friendship which existed between them, and enjoyed many a comfortable cry over it in subsequent years.

The organ was rolling great waves of sorrowful music about the vaulted roof of the cathedral, Dr. Rydal, the organist, being plunged in one of those fits of profound melancholy to which the artistic temperament is liable. Such a gloom had not brooded over him for years, and all his efforts to shake it off and modulate his mournful cadences into more joyous harmonies were vain; so at last he gave rein to it, and passed out of one minor key into another, until he glided finally into the passionate pleading of Mendelssohn's "O Lord, have mercy, and blot out my transgression," from the St. Paul, and the choir paced in with even

step, a long procession of white robes, closed by the dean's scarlet hood and the bishop's lawn.

People noticed the dean's worn face and his look of utter weariness, particularly when he stood up to read the First Lesson, which chanced to contain the pathetic story of the death of Absalom, and never, they thought, was the pathos of that divine narrative, the stumbling-block and the despair of most readers, more truly and beautifully rendered. His magnificent voice never for a moment escaped his control, but pealed steadily on, giving due weight and meaning to every syllable, and throwing the full measure of the stricken and penitent father's anguish into the heart-rending words, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"—words so nobly simple in their unutterable sorrow.

Many eyes were wet when the dean ended his reading, and most of those who were listening remembered of how many Absaloms he had been bereaved; but they did not dream how close the parallel was between him and David, who knew that his own sin had wrought him these terrible woes.

He had not observed the immense concourse of people; his eyes had been bent on the ground, his soul had been too conscious of awful presences, too occupied by eternal realities, to be disturbed by anything human when he entered the holy building. But when he finished reading and was turning from the lectern, the force of old habit was so strong upon him that he lifted his head, and with one lightning glance swept all the crowded spaces of the vast building, and encountered the multitudinous gaze of the great sea of faces.

He saw the premier, the familiar figures of the dwellers in the close, and the people from the city and its environs, the fashion of Belminster and its commerce, working people and idlers, the known and the unknown, the choir and the clergy, the bishop and the quaintly clad almsmen; and, quite near him, Lady Louisa, with Lord Arthur and the duke and duchess, who had driven through the hot sun all the way from the castle with their distinguished guest for the express purpose of hearing the famed eloquence of the bishop-elect.

He thought that all that multitude must soon know his shame, they who honoured him and hung waiting upon his words, and the thousand eyes bent upon him, more or less full of the deep thoughts stirred by the divine narrative he had just read so perfectly, seemed like so many points of flame darting into the most secret recesses of his soul; he turned sick, and longed for the pavement beneath his feet to yawn and swallow him. What

mortal could bear that crushing weight of scorn? he wondered. The mere anticipation of it stopped his breath and made his heart shudder with a piercing pain; it must certainly kill him.

He returned to his stall, against the dark carved work of which his face showed like some beautiful Greek marble, quite as white and still, and the organ pealed, and the voices of the full choir blended in magnificent billows of song, and the words of the *Magnificat* fell upon his unheeding ear, till a bass voice separated itself from the others, and thundered out, "He hath put down the mighty from their seat," in tones which seemed to convey a special menace to his troubled soul.

The great congregation seemed to melt away, and before his eyes lived the face that had never left him since the moment when he first saw it, two nights ago—the worn and wasted face of his betrayed friend, with its loyal gaze of heroic sadness "looking ancient kindness" upon his self-accusing misery. Never, he thought, while he lived, would the look of that face cease to haunt him—never, perhaps, even through all the endless ages of eternity. And not that face alone; others less kindly arose to hunt his tortured soul with their glances.

Alma Lee, in all the lustre of her fresh, unsullied beauty, as he had seen her in her father's house on the night when he rescued her from the waggoner's rudeness; Alma, with the startled self-betrayal in her guileless, passionate glance; Alma, a little child, sporting with him over the meadow, wreathed with chains of flowers or crowned with berry crowns; and Alma, ruined, with a new and sinister splendour in her beauty, as she stood and swore away the honour of his friend. The child eyes hurt him most; "Give me back my innocence," they said, in their dumb, sweet appeal.

Then Ben Lee rose, with the fierce passion in his livid face, and the dreadful stain upon it: "Give me back my life, and the honour of my child!" cried his angry, accusing glance. He saw the estranged, terrified look in Marion's dying eyes. His dead babes came with strange reproach in their appealing glances, and asked why they were only born to fade; and Lilian looked upon him with her sweet and loving gaze, and asked dumbly for the lover of her youth, and the children who were never born. "And Lilian must know all," he thought, with agony. But the look in the eyes of the betrayed was present through all, and that look was like an anchor to stay his shuddering soul upon.

The voices of the choir rose upon the mighty pinions of the anthem, and eased his heart somewhat of its sore burden. "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all my misdeeds," they sang

in strains that seemed to issue from the depths of broken hearts. The sweet and sorrowful music sank into his soul with healing balm; a pure-toned soprano repeated the phrase in soul-subduing melody, and a solemn peace fell upon him in spite of all those visionary glances turned so accusingly towards him.

And now it was time for him to ascend the pulpit, and he rose from his stall with his accustomed air of quiet reverence, and walked up the choir. As he went, his eye fell upon that symbol of solemn humbug—for he did not believe in it; he had worn it and abstained from wine only for the sake of influence—the scrap of blue ribbon which was attached to his surplice, and he took it off and cast it on the pavement beneath his feet. He had done with all fripperies and unrealities now; his soul stood at last, stripped of all pretence, in the awful presence of his Maker.

Save that his face was very pale, and there were purple shadows about his mouth, there was nothing unusual in his manner as he ascended the steps to the pulpit amid the rolling harmonies of the hymn, in which the vast congregation joined, and looked round upon the familiar spectacle of the multitude of faces. There he stood, one sinful man in the presence of many sinful men, erring and weak and weary, and all unworthy of the garb he wore, yet the ambassador of high heaven, and charged with a divine message—a solitary figure on an awful eminence.

It was a beautiful, an inspiring, and to him a familiar scene, which offered itself to his gaze. Immediately beneath and around him, shut in by the dark, rich cavity of the choir, were the white robes of the choristers, interspersed with the bright silk hoods of the clergy, and the gay and rich summer dresses of ladies, just relieved by a sprinkling of black coats. All down the nave spread a dark dimly seen mass of human beings, varied by the glow of a soldier's coat or the brightness of a woman's dress catching the broad afternoon light, which, streaming through the great west window, fell in broken rays of many-coloured glory here and there, or, entering through the clear aisle windows, shed a diffused whiteness over all.

On either side the choir, aisle and transept presented the same aspect of massed humanity; some long, dusty rods of golden light fell athwart the shadowy choir, and turned a black oak crocket or fretted pinnacle to gold; and from all that vast mass of standing worshippers rose the mighty surge of a penitential hymn, and rolled in solemn, far-spreading billows around the sinful man who stood a witness between earth and heaven upon the solitary height.

But the dean's steadfast, forward gaze saw nothing of the

spectacle before him, a spectacle so wont to inspirit him to his loftiest flights; he was not even conscious of those haunting, accusing glances from the past: was conscious, for those few brief moments in which he strove to nerve himself to an effort beyond his strength, of nothing but the presence of the Maker against whom he had sinned, and saw only the sorrowful glance which has gazed from the Cross all down the ages upon the deeds of sinful men. His soul stood, stripped and shuddering with the shame of its uncovered sin, in the searching light of the awful glance from which the first sinner vainly tried to hide.

The vast surge of the hymn subsided, the plaintive murmurs of the organ died away lingeringly among the echoing aisles, the worshippers rustled to their seats, and every eye was turned expectantly upon the preacher, who quailed slightly before the innumerable gaze, and, coming to himself, thought with agony of the thing that must soon lie bare and open before them. His lips blanched in the strenuous anguish of his internal conflict, and the power of speech deserted him for a second or two. His manuscript lay open and ready on the desk; he looked upon and read the neatly written text. Then he took from his pocket a piece of folded paper, which he held in his left hand, as if it were some talisman, and found strength to begin.

CHAPTER IX.

As he opened his lips, a vision of the little church at Malbourne rushed swiftly before his mental gaze. He saw the familiar faces clustered about the heavy grey pillars, and the reverend figure of his father in the ancient pulpit, and all the holy counsels uttered in that father's beloved voice came upon him in one moment; but he did not know that this his father's last sermon was the echo of his own first.

He gave out his text, "I will confess my wickedness, and be sorry for my sin," and began quietly reading from the manuscript before him in a clear and harmonious but strikingly level tone, which, though audible all over the building, did not correct the general tendency to drowsiness on that hot and drowsy afternoon.

The premier and those who heard him for the first time were disappointed, the premier deciding within himself that he would not confer much lustre upon the oratory of the Upper House,

and would never endanger Bishop Oliver's position as the best speaker on the Bench.

It was a sermon such as dozens of clergymen turn out every day. The preacher exhorted his hearers to repent and confess their sins. He reminded them that repentance is the first and last duty which the Church enjoins on her children. He alluded to the differing practice of the Church in different ages with regard to it, and its exaggeration in the Roman Communion and in old American Puritan days. He observed that some sins exacted public confession. At this point he became a little paler, and his voice rose on its accustomed sonorous swell. He said that it was a right and wholesome feeling which prostrated a crowned king before the tomb of the murdered archbishop at Canterbury, kept an emperor barefoot in the snow at Canossa, and humiliated Theodosius before the closed gates of Milan Cathedral. "Do you know, my brothers," he continued, with a thrill of intense feeling in his voice, "why I speak to-day of the duty of public confession of public sin? I have a purpose."

He paused. For some moments there reigned that dead silence which is so awfully impressive in a vast assembly of living and breathing human beings. He paused so long that people grew uncomfortable, thinking he must be ill, and the buzzing of a perplexed humble-bee, which had somehow strayed into the choir, and was tumbling aimlessly against people's heads, sounded loud and profane, and the man who could not repress a sneeze and the lady who let her Prayer-book fall felt each guilty of an unpardonable crime. Meantime, the dean gazed quietly before him, and no one saw the chill drops of agony which beaded his brow, or suspected the anguish which literally rent his heart.

The bishop with difficulty suppressed a grunt of disapproval. "He pauses for effect," he thought; "now for the fireworks! Divine rage consumes the dean! Out with the handkerchiefs. If people must rant, why on earth can't they rant in barns?"

"My brothers," continued the dean, at last breaking the thrilling silence, and speaking in a low but perfectly clear and audible voice, "it is because I myself am the most grievous of sinners and have sinned publicly in the face of this great congregation, the meanest among whom I am unworthy to address, because I wish to confess my wickedness, and tell you that I am sorry for my sin. I have no right to be standing in this place to-day; to be the parish priest, as it were, of this noble building; to fill an office hallowed by the service of a long line of saintly men. My life has been one black lie. The three darkest blots

upon the soul of man—*impurity*, *bloodshed*, *treachery*—have stained my soul."

At these words there was a faint rustle of surprise through all the congregation. The bishop frowned; "He drives his theatrical exaggeration too far," he thought. The duke and Lord Arthur recovered from the gentle slumber the sermon's beginning had induced. Every eye was fixed in wonder, interest, or incredulity upon the marble features of the preacher—that is, every eye within the choir; while to those outside it, who heard the voice from an invisible source, the effect was doubled.

"My life," he continued, "has been outwardly successful in no small degree. I have, in spite of my sin, been permitted to minister to sick souls; for the Almighty is pleased sometimes to use the vilest instruments for noble ends. I have sat at good men's feasts, an honoured guest; yes, and at the tables of the great, the very greatest in the land. I have risen to a position of eminence in the ministry of our national Church—that Church whose meanest office better men than I are unworthy to fill. I have been offered still greater honours, the office of bishop and the dignity of a spiritual peerage, as you all know; nor was it till now my intention to decline this promotion. I have been much before the public in other ways, which it were unbecoming to mention in this holy place. Such dignities as have been mine, my brothers—for I may still, in spite of my sins, call you brothers, since I am still God's child, and only desire to return to Him by the way of penitence—such dignities are based upon the assumption not only of moral rectitude, but of decided piety, and neither of these *has ever been mine*. My beloved brothers, hear me, and take warning, and oh! pity me, for I am the most miserable of men. Like those against whom Christ pronounced such bitter woes, I have desired to wear long robes, to receive greetings in the market-place, to occupy the chief seats in synagogues: these things have been the very breath of my nostrils, and for these I have sinned heavily, heavily. The favour of men has been dear to me, therefore I offer myself to their scorn. To no man, I think, has man's favour been dearer than to me. Ah, my brothers, there is no more bitter poison to the soul than the sweetness I loved with such idolatry! Well does our Saviour warn us against it."

He spoke all this with quiet anguish, straight from his heart, his manuscript being closed; while at this point tears came and dimmed the blue lustre of his large deep eyes, and coursed quietly and unheeded down his cheeks. The congregation still listened with wide-eyed wonder, not knowing how to take these extraordinary utterances, and half suspecting that they were the victims of

some stage effect. But the premier's face wore a startled gaze, and he looked round uneasily. The idea suddenly entered his head, that his recent elevation and the strenuously toilsome life he led had been too much for the dean, and driven him mad. Nor was he alone in his belief, which was shared by the dean's doctor amongst others.

The bishop was terribly moved, and half doubtful whether it would not be well to persuade the preacher to leave the pulpit as quietly as possible; he too thought the dean mad, and trembled lest the gossip his own son had repeated might have driven his sensitive organization off its balance. Tears sprang to his eyes, and he loathed himself for the petty feelings he had suffered to enter his heart that very day.

"What I confess now, in the presence of God and of this congregation, against whom I have sinned," continued the preacher, "I shall confess shortly before the civil tribunals of this land, the laws of which I have broken. Nineteen years ago, when in deacon's orders, I led an innocent young woman astray." Here his voice broke with a heavy sob. "I was the tempter—I, who fell because I deemed myself above temptation. My brothers, since then I have not had one happy hour. Mark that, you who perchance stand on the verge of transgression. But that is not all. With a heart still stained with that iniquity, which I vainly tried to expiate by bodily penance, I took upon me, in this very cathedral, the awful responsibilities of the priesthood, and fell into new temptation.

"The father of this poor girl discovered my iniquity, and, justly angered, fell upon me with violence. In the struggle, I know not how, I killed him. Yes, my brothers, look upon me with the honest scorn you must feel when you hear that these hands, which have broken the bread of life and sprinkled the waters of healing, are red with the blood of the man I wronged. But even that is not the full measure of my iniquity. I had a friend; I loved him —I loved him, I tell you," he echoed passionately, "more than any mortal man. He was a man of noble character and spotless life; he had gifts which gave promise of a glorious and beneficent career. Suspicion fell upon him through my fault, but not my deliberate fault. He was tried for my crime, found guilty, and sentenced to twenty years' penal servitude."

Here the preacher trembled exceedingly, and was obliged to pause, while people looked from one to another with horror-stricken eyes and blanched faces, and the very air seemed to palpitate with their agitation. "Two days ago," continued the unhappy man, "he came, fresh from the prison, to worship in this

noly place. I was preaching—I, the traitor, the hypocrite; I who had lived in palaces while the friend of my youth pined in the prison I had deserved—I saw him; I recognized him through all the terrible changes that awful misery had wrought upon him. I could not bear the sight, and fled from it like another Cain. But I did not even then repent.

"My brothers, this man wrote to me and forgave me, and that broke my stony heart. The Almighty had called me by heavy sorrows through many years to repentance, but I repented not until I was forgiven. The All-Merciful did not leave me alone in my wickedness. I saw the wife of my youth pine away before my eyes, and my children fade one by one till my home became a desolation, and yet I sinned on, deadening my conscience by continual opiates of subtlest sophistry. It is not for me to detail these; to say how I persuaded myself that my gifts were needed in the ministry of the Church; that I was bound to sacrifice all, even conscience, to the sacred calling, and such-like. Blind was I, blind with pride and self-love. Nay, I refused even to look my sin in the face. I stifled memory; I never realized what I had done until the awful moment of revelation, when I stood eye to eye with the friend I betrayed. My dear brothers, have you ever thought what years of penal servitude must mean to a gentleman, a man of refined feelings, of intellectual tastes, of unusual culture? To be herded with the vicious, the depraved, the brutal, the defective or degraded organizations which swell the mass of crime in our land; to be cut off from all other human intercourse, all converse with the world of intellect and culture; to pass weary, weary years in fruitless manual toil and pining captivity; to wear the garb of shame; to be subject to rough and uneducated and not always kindly gaolers"—here something choked his utterance for awhile —"to know no earthly hope; to see the long vista of twenty years' monotonous misery stretching remorselessly ahead, and all this in the flower of youth and the blossom-time of life? From six and twenty to six and forty! Can you grasp what that means? This, and more than this, I inflicted on the friend who loved and trusted me; and of this I declare before God and man I repent, and desire as far as possible to amend.

"In a few days I shall be in a felon's cell. I shall be happier there than I have ever been in the brightest moments of my prosperity. My brothers, I still bear a divine commission to warn and teach; I beseech you to heed my story and take warning. Let me be to you as the sunken vessel which marks the treacherous reef beneath the wave! Listen and heed well what I say, as it were, with dying breath, for I shall be civilly dead, virtually dead,

in twelve hours' time. I repent, and there is mercy for me as for the vilest; but I can *never* undo the consequences of my sins—never, though I strove through all the endless ages of eternity. I cannot restore honour and innocence to her whom I robbed of these priceless jewels. I cannot give back his life to him whose blood I shed. I cannot recall the years of youth, and hope, and health, and power of wide usefulness which were blasted in the prison of my friend. It were rash to say that the Almighty cannot do these things; it is certain He cannot without disordering the whole scheme of human life, certain that He will not. How far the human will can frustrate the divine purposes has never been revealed to mortal man—is probably unknown to the wisdom of seraphs; but this we know, that nothing can happen without divine permission. It may be that man's will is absolutely free with regard to thought, and only limited with regard to action, to its effects upon others. Certain it is, that God can bring good out of evil, and that those who trust in Him, however oppressed and afflicted by the wickedness of their fellow-men, will nevertheless be delivered in all their afflictions, and that to them 'all things work for good.' These are my last words, dear brothers. Ponder them, I beseech you, as men ponder dying words, even of the vilest."

The dean ceased, and, turning, as usual, to the east, repeated the ascription with humble reverence. He then turned once more to the congregation, and seated himself with a sigh of exhaustion; while the bishop, whose eyes were full of tears, stood with uplifted hand and pronounced the benediction, in a moved and awe-stricken voice, upon the agitated, half-terrified multitude, and upon the unheeding ears of the dean.

As this strange discourse proceeded, the excitement of the congregation had waxed higher and higher, and spread itself by the irresistible contagion of sympathy which exists in a vast assembly. The prevalent idea was that the dean was mad. Many people present had heard the story of his youth, and knew how bitter had been his sorrow for his friend's disgrace, and it was not unnatural to suppose that long brooding upon this early grief had, in a moment of mental aberration, worked itself into the hallucination that he was himself the doer of the crime which had wrought such sorrow.

In spite of the rumours circulated so swiftly within the last few days, there were not many who believed the dean's accusations against himself. All were, however, immensely relieved when the painful scene was ended. Women had become hysterical, and some had fainted and been carried out; the choristers were

mostly pale with affright; the clergy were dismayed, and whispered together about the expediency of putting an end to this painful exhibition. Among the few who took the sermon seriously was the clergyman who had heard the death-bed statement of Alma Judkins. This man heard, and trembled, and wept.

The prayer after the blessing was ended, the congregation rose from their knees, the organ broke forth in melodious thunders, and the choir began their slow and orderly procession as usual. But the dean did not descend from the pulpit and take his usual place in the rear of the clergy, and the bishop, thinking he must be ill, directed a verger to go and offer him help. The man, excited and overstrained as he was by the strong feelings stirred up by that strange discourse, ascended the stairs and spoke softly to the dean, who had not moved from his marble composure. There was no answer.

A cry burst from the man's lips, and rang above the rolling harmonies to the very ends of the long aisles.

The dean was dead.

CHAPTER X.

STILL unconscious of the tragedy that was being enacted to its close in Belminster Cathedral that sunny summer afternoon, the little family circle at Malbourne finished the quiet and holy day as they had begun it, and, retiring early to rest, slept such calm and refreshing slumbers as visit the gentle and the good.

Lilian's last thought on sleeping and first on waking was for Cyril, and how she might help to heal his sorely stricken soul, while the dreadful certainty which had followed on her long suspense and doubt on the subject of his guilt, though it filled her with deep sorrow, yet brought the calm which never fails to accompany certainty, however terrible.

She was very quiet at breakfast next morning, and Mr. Maitland, observing this, attributed it to the reaction following on the excitement of the last few days, and was more cheery and chatty than usual to make up for her silence.

Mark Antony, like other invalids, was always very shaky of a morning, and declined this day to rise for his breakfast; so a saucer of milk was placed by his padded basket on the sunny window-sill, but remained untouched.

The creature looked up in response to the caressing hand and

voice of his mistress, and purred faintly, but turned away his head from the proffered milk; and, after coaxing him, and offering him everything she could think of, Lilian was about to leave her pet to rest and recover strength in the sunshine, when her retreating figure was stayed by a faint mew, and, turning, she saw the poor little thing staggering from its bed, and trying to follow her.

She ran back in time to catch the little body as it tottered and fell, and, with a loving glance and one soft attempt at a purr, lay limp and lifeless in her hands.

"Oh, Henry!" she cried, the hot tears raining from her eyes, "my pretty Mark!"

"I could have better spared a better cat!" said Mr. Maitland.

"No cat ever had a pleasanter life, or an easier death," said Everard, stroking the inanimate fur. "I will bury him for you, Lilian. Let us choose a pretty spot at once."

And they went into the garden, Everard procuring a spade and setting to work with a practised ease that reminded Lilian of his long years of hard labour, on the flower-border beneath the window, on the sill of which the deceased had spent so many sunny hours in peaceful meditation upon the follies of mankind and the wisdom of the feline race.

The grave had been properly dug, and Everard laid the cat in it, and having covered him with a verdant shroud, reminded Lilian that mourners always turned from the grave before the painful ceremony of shovelling in the earth was performed; and Lilian was obeying this suggestion, when she discovered the hitherto unnoticed presence of a messenger, who handed her a telegram.

She took it without suspicion, and delayed opening it until she had spoken a kindly word to the messenger, and directed the gardener to take him to the kitchen for rest and refreshment.

"If he had not caused me such bitter pain," she said, turning to Henry, and referring to the cat, while she broke open the envelope, "I should not have loved him half so much."

"Dear old Mark! We shall not look upon his like again. He did indeed give the world assurance of a cat."

He was not looking at Lilian, but into the grave, and was startled by a low cry of intense agony, and, looking up, saw her stagger with blanched face against the mullion of the window, where the roses bloomed round her head.

"My poor, poor boy!" she cried gaspingly.

Everard dropped the spade and came to her assistance, and she gave the paper with the terrible tidings into his hand.

"The dean died yesterday afternoon in the cathedral," was the brief, stern announcement.

"My father, oh, my father! how shall we shield him?" cried Lilian, recovering her feet, but trembling all over. "I always open his telegrams to spare him."

Everard said nothing, but crushed the paper fiercely in his pocket, while from the force of old habit he took his spade again and completed his task, no longer careful to spare Lilian's feelings, but stamping the earth resolutely down, and planting the displaced flowers upon it. Then he threw the spade aside with a deep groan.

"If he could but have spoken to me once, only once!" he said.

"He got your letter, dear," said Lilian, in her usual tones, though her white lips quivered, and she still shook all over; "there is comfort in that."

"Yes, he must have got it. He could not have been too ill to read it. 'In the cathedral.' Oh, Lilian, he might have died that night! There was probably some heart disease. What did he think of his seizures?"

"Mere nervous excitement. He did not consider himself ill. He had advice. Oh, Henry, my father!"

"It will be a blow."

"It will kill him! He is feebler than you think. How can he bear this?"

"Dearest," said Everard, with infinite tenderness, "it is but death, remember. He might have heard worse tidings."

"My poor Cyril!—yes. If we could only bear the consequences of our misdeeds alone, each in his own person, how much less sorrowful life would be!"

"And how much less joyous, Lilian! Ah, my dear, this must be faced, and we must take what comfort we can!"

Then they took counsel together, and decided upon assuming that the dean was very ill, and that they were summoned to him at once. They could then accustom Mr. Maitland's mind gradually to the loss, and extinguish hope by degrees until they arrived at Belminster, when it would no longer be possible to cherish any doubt.

Everard took upon himself the piteous task of breaking the news, while Lilian made hurried preparations for their departure. He went with a beating heart to the study door, and knocked, and then it came like lightning across him that he had so gone to that room eighteen years ago, to receive, and not to give, ill tidings.

When the gentle priest lifted his white head with a pleasant smile from the book over which he was bending, he could not but think of the awful look with which he had greeted him on his last

entrance, nor could he quite forget the bitter injustice done to him then for Cyril's sake. It seemed a terrible retribution for the guileless man, whose only fault was too great a pride in his gifted son. Everard felt as if his heart would break. He could not speak, but sat down and burst into tears, the only tears shed for Cyril in his home. The fact that he, and no other, had to deal the aged father this cruel blow, on the very spot where so cruel a blow had been dealt him through that dead man's fault, seemed an awful coincidence.

Mr. Maitland's face changed; he was in a mood to anticipate calamity, but he took it very gently.

"Is it Lilian?" he asked, in a faint voice.

Everard shook his head.

"Not, oh, not *Cyril!*" faltered the old man, with a piteous accent, which showed where his heart was most vulnerable.

"He is ill, sir," returned Everard; "seriously ill."

Then he told him of the arrangements they had made for going at once to Belminster, and offered what assistance was needed.

Mr. Maitland said nothing, but rose to do as he was bid, with a touching acquiescence, but very feeble movements. He seemed to age ten years at least before Everard's pitying gaze, and was apparently unequal to the task of doing anything in preparation for his absence from his duties.

They drove into Oldport just in time to catch the train, and Everard and Lilian trembled for the poor father as they passed the flaring posters which announced the contents of the daily papers, and read in great capitals, "Sudden Death of the Dean of Belminster."

But Mr. Maitland did not appear to see them; he was bewildered and pre-occupied in his manner, and asked only one question, "Did Cyril himself send for him?" and, appearing crushed by the negative answer, made no further observation upon passing events. He talked much in a wandering way of bygone days, and related old forgotten events of Cyril's childhood, surprising Lilian by vivid reminiscences that were dim or quite faded in her memory, and laughing gently from time to time at the child's quaint sayings and little drolleries of long ago.

"They were twins," he said, addressing Lilian, as if she were a stranger; "a boy and a girl—such a pretty pair, and so good and clever! Exactly alike, and so fond of each other—so fond of each other! Poor dears!" he added, shaking his white head sorrowfully, "drowned before their father's eyes—before his very eyes."

"Oh, Henry!" murmured Lilian, in a choked voice, "what shall we do? He wanders; he confuses us with Cyril's twins."

"Do not excite him; it is only temporary," Henry whispered back.

"Always a good son—a good son!" continued the stricken father, not observing their comments; "my son, the Dean of Belminster. Do you know," he added, with a pleasant smile, "he has been offered the Bishopric of Warham?"

"Yes, dear father," replied Lilian, soothingly; "but he is very, very ill."

"Ill?" he returned, with a troubled look; "not Cyril? He did everything well. A gifted youth. Little Lilian was so like him."

"Dear father," said Lilian, when the last station before Belminster was passed, "Cyril can never recover."

"Is that true, Henry?" he asked, turning sharply to Everard.

"It is too true, sir," he replied gently. "Try to be calm; we shall be at Belminster in five minutes."

The old man looked about him in a hopeless, bewildered manner, and tried to speak, but his trembling lips refused utterance. Lilian caressed him, and spoke soothingly to him, as if to some frightened child. "Cyril is gone to his rest, dear," she said at last, her voice breaking as she spoke.

"Is he—dead?" he asked, with great difficulty; and Lilian replied in the affirmative, and he smiled a gentle smile that went to their very hearts, and said nothing more.

They drove through the city and into the close, in the sunny, slumbrous noon, past the red-brick houses, looking blank in the sunshine, with their white blinds darkening the windows; beneath the great leafy elms, over which some rooks were sailing; past the hoary fragment of cloister, along which two clergymen were pacing, and talking with bated breath of yesterday's tragedy; beneath the cool shadow of the great grey minster, whose vaulted roof and long aisles had scarcely ceased to thrill with the passionate anguish of Cyril's breaking heart, and round whose lofty pinnacles swallows were sweeping in the warm, blue air; and drew up before the pointed arches of the silent Deanery, the door of which opened noiselessly and discovered a weeping figure ready to receive them.

Before they could respond to Miss Mackenzie's greeting, Everard was obliged to call Lilian's attention to her father, who had to be lifted from the carriage and taken at once to bed, where he remained for many days in a lethargic condition.

There would be no inquest, Miss Mackenzie informed them,

the death being perfectly natural and accounted for by the disease from which his medical adviser, as well as the dean, had long known him to be suffering—a disease which might still have permitted him years of life and strength under favourable conditions. His children had not been sent for, as, under the very painful circumstances, Miss Mackenzie could not undertake the responsibility of summoning them.

"Painful circumstances?" asked Lilian, whose marble-white features showed scarcely more life than those of the brother over whose corpse she had just been bending in tearless, speechless sorrow, whose features indeed looked more like those of the dean than ever.

Miss Mackenzie having turned the key in the door, to ensure uninterrupted privacy, sat down in the darkened chamber, and, saying that Dr. Everard was better calculated than any one else to judge of the accuracy of what she was about to relate, told them that it was the general opinion that the dean had been visited by temporary insanity while in the pulpit the day before—an opinion, however, which was not shared by the doctor. Then, beginning with the dean's unwonted demeanour on the Saturday, and the abrupt manner in which he sent his children away, she related the whole story of the last Sunday, and the substance of the extraordinary sermon he had delivered with his dying breath.

Lilian listened quietly without any interrogation whatever; but when Miss Mackenzie came to the dying man's terrible confession, her marble stillness left her, and she burst into tears and wept silently till the end of the story, murmuring, under her breath, "Thank God! oh, thank God!" She felt that her brother was in some measure restored to her by his penitence.

The dean's affairs were in perfect order; he had made every preparation for death. The bishop was co-executor with Lilian of a will he had made some time previously, by which he left half his property to Henry Everard, and the other half to his two children, under the trusteeship of Lilian, till they should be of age, when the boy, in consideration of his infirmity, was to receive two-thirds of the children's moiety, and the girl one.

Certain legacies were to be deducted from the whole amount of his property; and, by a codicil, added on the day before his death, there was to be a further deduction of five hundred pounds, which was bequeathed to "Benjamin Lee, only son of Alma Judkins, widow, formerly of Swaynestone, and lately deceased in Belminster." The said Benjamin Lee was further recommended to the interest and protection of "my beloved twin-sister, Lilian Maitland."

The terms of this testament were as yet unknown to any one

except the solicitor and the bishop, who had that morning acquainted himself with them. He had made this early inquisition into the dean's temporal affairs in consequence of finding in the study a sealed packet addressed to himself, as executor, "In case of my death before I have time to lay it before the magistrates myself," dated on the day before his death, duly signed and witnessed, and containing a full and detailed account of the death of Benjamin Lee, "to be read immediately after my death, that justice may be done as soon as possible to those I have wronged."

The bishop, who had with natural reluctance undertaken the management of the dean's affairs only upon his earnest solicitation, and under the consideration that in the course of nature the dean would outlive him, now wished most heartily that he had had sufficient strength of mind to resist his importunity on the subject. He wished it doubly when, on that very morning, the clergyman who had heard Alma's confession, and taken it down at her request in writing, to which she affixed her signature, confided the circumstances to him, and asked his advice upon the subject.

Both the bishop and Mr. Strickland had separately hesitated to publish the dead man's disgrace, though the latter had been solemnly charged to do so by the dying Alma, and summoned to her death-bed for the express purpose of clearing Everard. The bishop, even after reading the written confession, still held to the theory of insanity; but, after the coincidence of the two independent confessions, there was no longer any room for doubt, and he felt it his duty to communicate at once with the Everard family, and take instant steps towards clearing Henry Everard's character, which he did accordingly. Nevertheless, Mr. Strickland was glad to share the responsibility with him.

But of this Miss Mackenzie, of course, knew nothing, and without had enough to tell her auditors. She ended by putting into Lilian's hands a report taken in shorthand of the dean's last sermon, which Henry and Lilian perused together.

Everard passed a long, long time alone in the presence of the dead. When he entered the silent, shadowed chamber, from which the summer airs were excluded, and across the gloom of which one or two long golden rays of sunshine strayed through unguarded chinks, and where the air was heavy with that indescribable something that we dare not name, and laden with the rich perfume of flowers, he stood still, with a spasm at his heart, and feared to raise the handkerchief from the veiled face.

And when at last he found courage to gaze upon the beautiful and placid features, pale with the awful pallor that only comes when the spirit has flown, he, who had looked upon death in

the course of everyday duty so often and under so many painful circumstances, realized for the first time the icy horror and irreconcilable enmity of death. A sharp pain, like the contraction of iron wires, clutched at his eyes, which filled with those scalding tears that do not fall or give relief, and only spring once or twice in life from the very deepest sources in our nature; and for a few moments he would have given all that remained to him of life for one friendly glance of the beautiful ever-darkened eyes, one clasp of the pale, cold hands; to hear those mute lips open once more with the cordial warmth of bygone days. "Old Hal!" he fancied he heard him say, as on the fatal day when last they met as friends.

The quiet features never moved from their marble calm, and yet to the living friend's fancy the lights of mirth, of intellect, of affection, seemed to play upon them as in their bygone youth, and the sacred flame of high aspiration, holy and pure passion, seemed to fire them. Old jests, old sayings, things grave and gay, earnest and light-hearted, rushed rapidly back upon his memory. He saw Cyril a boy again—a child with a seraphic face, and a half-piteous look of frailty and dependence, combined with intellectual power; he saw him a youth full of high hopes and warm enthusiasms, brilliant, generous, fascinating, and, above all, pure.

He saw him in his young manhood, a being so saintly that his very presence seemed to banish the possibility of unholy thought; a lover, the purity of whose ardent love seemed almost to rebuke passion; a scholar, a priest: he thought of his many gifts and attainments, and all the beautiful promise of his early manhood. In such a nature, weaknesses and errors, the common heritage of humanity, might be expected; but there was an incredible horror in the thought that this man was stained with vice and crime. Surely, Everard thought, as he had thought so many times in the loneliness of his cell, such things were utterly alien to this pure and noble nature, and utterly alien and incongruous they were. Surely, if there were a soul fitted to resist the importunity of man's lower nature, here was one; and here indeed was one.

Then he recalled the anguish of Cyril's words—almost the last he ever spoke to him—"Henry, I am a *man!*" and reflected that to a human being there is no moral descent impossible. Yet from a what height had this man fallen! And what a career he might have had, who now lay dead of a broken heart before him; and what anguish unspeakable might have been spared to others, had this gifted and noble nature had the courage to be true to itself! He thought of the terrific strength of those master-passions,

ambition, pride, and self-love, in that otherwise weak soul, and shuddered.

They had thrown a rich Indian cloth over the library table, and upon this they had laid the dean, robed again as he had been at the moment of his death. The still room, with its studious gloom and its rows of learned tomes of divinity, was decked with flowers, and wreaths and bouquets covered the feet of the dead, and lay upon the outer folds of the white robe. In the pale hands Lilian had placed some blood-red roses, which she had brought from Malbourne, plucked from two trees they planted on their twenty-first birthday — an unacknowledged instinct made her shrink from the white flowers so usual in the death-chamber and these and the scarlet doctor's hood gave a strange lustre to the solemn scene, and strongly emphasized the Parian whiteness of the face and hands. Those who saw Cyril die had seen the agony pass from his face, which was, as it were, transfigured at the close of his sermon by a look of ineffable serenity, a look that never left it. The dead face was that of the young ideal Cyril of Henry's youth, the man his Maker intended him to be ; the man he ever lived afterwards in his friend's thoughts. Both features and expression now had the strong likeness to Lilian's which had been so marked in their childhood.

The door of the silent chamber was opened more than once that afternoon, and softly closed again, unnoticed by Henry ; and those who thus forbore to intrude on his grief never forgot the scene—the dead man lying in his awful quiet like some sculptured effigy on a tomb, but not more statuesque than the living friend seated in the chair by his side, facing him, with his grey head supported on his hand, and his eyes rivetted upon the unseeing face.

Pleasant summer sounds of bird and insect, and even the far-off laughter of children, fell deadened upon the hushed silence of that darkened room ; the silvery cadences of the cathedral chimes entered it from time to time, and at the hour of evensong the distant thunder of organ-music broke solemnly upon its calm.

The lines of straying sunshine stole slowly from point to point ; once the end of a broken shaft fell upon the pale hands and gilded the edge of a paper clasped in the unconscious fingers —Everard knew that it was his own letter which had been so clasped at the moment of death, and which those who found it in the nerveless hand, on seeing, had again shut in the stiffening clasp—the wavering shadows of leaves and boughs played in varying dance over the closed blinds of the casements ; hour after hour went by, and the living man seemed to change into the semblance of the still form he gazed upon.

He thought many, many thoughts, such as no words can express, and experienced feelings such as no speech may render —thoughts which arise only when the intellect is quickened by the stir of unwonted feeling; thoughts of life and its deep meaning, death and its dark mystery; of the strangeness of man's destiny; of the purpose of his being; of the limits of human will, and of the eternal consequences of human action; of the glory and beauty of moral rectitude, and the nothingness of all human achievement besides.

Through all his thoughts there ran the deep, strong undercurrent of unutterable pity for the man who lay before him, slain in his prime by the pain of his own misdoing, and, blended with that, there was also a thankfulness that his agony was stilled at last, and his soul at rest. He recognized the righteousness of the feeling which prompted Cyril to his tardy confession, and knew that no life save that imprisoned and degraded one from which he had but just escaped would have been possible to him. He thought of the iron strength of this man's pride and self-love, and wondered at the mystery of human iniquity.

He mused on his own passionate and life-long devotion to the man who had so terribly injured him, a devotion that neither his weakness nor even his crime could quite destroy, and he asked himself what it was in Cyril that so enchained not only the best and deepest affections of his friends, but also the love of all those with whom he came in contact.

It seemed to him that there must be some deep and enduring virtue in a man who wins such love and devotion; it appeared incredible that the affections of honest hearts should be wasted on what is utterly worthless.

He reflected how he could best serve the dead. He saw that he had been wrong in aiding him to conceal his past—that nothing but truth can serve any human being; and it seemed to him that he might fulfil those duties he had left undone, and carry on those that death had interrupted. He thought especially of Alma's neglected child.

He could not rid himself of the strong feeling we have in the presence of the dead, that the spirit is hovering about its forsaken shrine, and is conscious of the thoughts we cherish, and it seemed to him that the dead lips smiled approval of his resolution. He mused upon the unfinished letter found upon Cyril's writing-table, and dated on the day of his death—"Dear Henry, your noble letter has broken my heart," and he felt, as in his ardent youth, that he could go through fire and water for this man.

He though of old that Cyril's character contained the *ewig*

weibliche element Goethe prized. He was wrong; that saving ingredient was in his own manlier nature, not in the weak Cyril's.

Through all his long reverie he did not stir from his statue-like calm; nothing in the still chamber marred the quiet which is the homage we pay to that silent terror, death. His very breath seemed stilled in the intensity of his abstraction; he did not see the shifting of the sunbeams, the gradual drooping of the flowers, the fall of petal after petal, nor did he hear the recurrent chime-music, though years afterwards these things recalled the solemn thoughts of that long vigil.

The air was cool and refreshing, and the slanting sunbeams were dyeing the minster towers a clear wine-like crimson, when his long reverie was broken at last by the entrance of Cyril's orphan children.

Then he rose, greeted them affectionately, and, bidding them look on him as their father now, he left them alone with their dead.

CHAPTER XI.

Everard closed the door softly behind him, and went into the hall with a solemn radiance on his face, and was about to ascend the staircase to inquire into Mr. Maitland's condition, when he was met by a gentleman with a benign and intellectual face and a dignified bearing.

"Dr. Everard," he said, in a rich, deep voice, "allow me the honour of shaking hands with a man whose noble conduct has perhaps saved a human soul. I am the Bishop of Belminster," he added, "the late dean's executor and friend, and am entrusted by him with the duty of clearing your character from the imputations which have laid so long upon it."

And, leading him into the study, where the evidences of the dean's daily occupations and the empty chair by the table, on which lay his unfinished tasks, spoke more pathetically of his death than his quiet form itself, the bishop acquainted him briefly with all that the reader knows already concerning the will, the written confession, and Alma's death-bed depositions. Having done this, he led him to the drawing-room, which was flushed through its closed blinds with the glory of the summer sunset, and introduced him to his brothers, Keppel and George, and his sister, Mrs. Whiteford, who were waiting to receive him, Keppel having brought the children from Portsmouth.

They greeted him with cordial affection, and many expressions of regret and contrition for their long injustice; and Keppel introduced him to Lady Everard, to whom he had been married after his brother's disgrace.

Henry was glad, though he could not but feel the meeting extremely painful, especially under Cyril's roof. The bishop had considerately withdrawn on presenting him, and, after the first confused expressions of welcome, regret, and congratulation, the relatives scarcely knew what to say to each other until Henry at last expressed a hope that all knowledge of Cyril's share in Benjamin Lee's death might be spared his children, which all agreed, if possible, to do.

Admiral Sir Keppel and the Rev. George, though both some years older than Henry, looked younger; neither had a grey hair, and both were fine, handsome, robust men. They were much distressed at the marks of hardship and suffering upon him, and Mrs. Whiteford wept and blamed herself greatly for allowing her husband to dissuade her from communicating with him in his trouble.

"You must pay us a long visit, Hal," said Keppel. "We have a nice place near Ryde, and the children will take you about in their boat, and make you young again."

"And you must certainly come to us," added George; "my wife told me to bring you home this very night. Our place is very healthily situated on the hill yonder, just outside Belminster."

"And to us," added Mrs. Whiteford. "My husband wants you to go for a cruise with us. That will recruit your health, if anything will."

"Ah, Henry, I can sympathize with you!" said George, with deep solemnity. "I know what a prison is like. I had a twelvemonth, the effects of which I am still feeling," he added, with a sigh of intense enjoyment.

"*You* had a twelvemonth?" inquired Henry, scanning his solemn clerical brother from head to foot with astonishment.

"You may well look surprised," said Keppel, "and wonder what parsons have to do with the inside of a gaol."

"I have experienced the honour of persecution, Henry," explained George, with deep satisfaction. "The rigours of my captivity were greatly softened by the sympathy of faithful people."

"Rigours indeed!" growled Keppel. "The beggar was in clover, and almost on his parole. But, as I tell George, he would have got double the time, and been cashiered into the bargain, if I had been in command."

"But, my dear George," asked Henry, "what were you persecuted for? and how could you be imprisoned? I thought the fires of Smithfield, the memory of which you used to be so fond of recalling, were extinguished centuries ago."

"You are mistaken, Henry," returned George, in his gruffest bass. "In the seclusion of your dungeon you have been spared even the knowledge of the awful evils we in the world have been called upon to face. Never was the enemy of mankind more active than in these latter evil days. The Catholic Church is beleaguered by all the powers of darkness, and those of her priests who dare to be faithful are hurled into dungeons."

"The Catholic Church? Why, I thought you were one of the strongest pillars of Protestantism, and renounced the scarlet woman and all her works? I am glad to see that persecution and dungeons have not permanently damaged you."

Keppel remembered the solemn tenant of the near chamber in time to stifle a burst of laughter, while George looked embarrassed, and stammered a good deal.

"Ah, Henry!" he replied, "you are thinking of twenty years ago, when I was in the depths; I have advanced greatly since then."

"You don't mean to say you are a Ritualist?" asked Henry, eyeing his brother's sacerdotal appearance with affectionate amusement.

"My dear Henry," said Keppel, interrupting George's disclaimer of this term, "that fellow is *the* Ritualist, the ringleader of them all. What the service would come to if mutineers were let down as lightly as he is, Heaven only knows. Persecution indeed!"

Henry smiled. "How this would have amused Cyril!" he said involuntarily. "No, George; I am not mocking," he added, in response to a pained look on his brother's face; for, as he learnt subsequently, Cyril had been wont to tease his reverend brother a good deal on the extreme to which he had veered from his ultra-Protestant opinions. "If you think it your duty to differ from your bishop, every one must honour you for going to prison about it. But your tenets used to be so very extreme in the other direction. Tell me about your children."

Every effort was made to keep Cyril's funeral as private as possible, but in vain. Lilian, who was co-executor with the bishop, had so much to occupy her in her father's illness, and her great anxiety to spare Marion and Everard the slightest suspicion of the tragedy which killed their father, that she left the

funeral arrangements to the bishop, only stipulating for extreme privacy. By some perverse destiny, the bishop misunderstood her wishes and those of the family, which were that Cyril's remains should be taken to Malbourne, and at the last moment it was discovered that all was arranged for an interment in the cathedral burial-ground.

Thither, therefore, the dean's remains were borne by the hands of those who had loved him and volunteered for this service, and the mourners, on following their dead into the cathedral, were dismayed to find it thronged from end to end by people, who wore mourning, and many of whom bore wreaths for the dead. They had feared a curious crowd, but the majority of this crowd were animated by something better than curiosity. Those who accepted the dean's terrible revelations came to honour his penitence and respect his fallen estate; many clergy came in the spirit which moved his brother-seer to do honour to the remains of the disobedient prophet.

But the public at large utterly refused all credence to his guilt, not only at the time of the funeral, but even after Alma's confession had been made public. Not a woman in Belminster, and not many men, held the golden-mouthed preacher and large-hearted philanthropist to be guilty. The question was largely discussed in the press, as well as in private circles; instances of similar self-accusations of half-forgotten crimes by those whose minds had been consumed by long-brooding grief and strained by overwork were cited, and it was the popular opinion that the dean died in the excitement of a terrible hallucination.

Flags were floated half-mast high, shops were shut, and knells were tolled in the city churches and in some villages on the day of the funeral. Clergymen came from rural parishes to pay the last homage to their great brother; the Nonconformist ministers, with whom he had always maintained such pleasant relations, flocked to the grave of the gifted and gracious Churchman; societies and charitable bodies in which he had taken interest sent deputations. Most of those who saw him die were there. In the midst of this vast concourse, beneath the majestic arches of the lofty cathedral, amid the dirge-like thunders of the organ and the mournful chanting of the full choir, there was a pathetic simplicity in the plain coffin, followed by its half-dozen mourners, foremost among whom showed the silvered head and bowed form of the friend so deeply wronged by the dead. Cyril's weeping daughter was on Everard's arm, and Lilian led his blind son by the hand; Ingram Swaynestone and George and Keppel Everard closed the list of kinsfolk. But the uninvited mourners were

innumerable, and the tears they shed were many, and not the least imposing part of the grand and solemn Burial Service was the immense volume of human voices, which rose like the sound of many waters upon the mournful strains of the funeral hymn.

As the close of the ceremony, Henry's attention was attracted to a young man who had pressed gradually nearer and nearer to the grave, into which he cast a wreath, and who manifested great emotion, which he nevertheless tried hard to restrain. There was something in the handsome face of this fine young fellow which sent a quiver through Henry's heart, and startled Lilian painfully —a something which moved Henry to accost the young man in the slight confusion which ensued while the little procession was reforming.

"You appear to be moved, sir," he said, in a low voice; "may I ask if you were an intimate friend of the late dean's?"

The youth was about to make some reply, when his gaze was arrested by the sorrowful glance of Marion, who was upon her uncle's arm. He stopped, as if in reference to her, and, instead of replying, took a card from his pocket and gave it to Everard, who read upon it, "Benjamin Lee."

"That will explain to Dr. Everard," he said, observing the change upon Everard's face.

Everard bid him call at the Deanery at a certain hour, and they had a long interview in the very room which had witnessed Cyril's anguish upon seeing his son.

"I would give half my life not to have spoken to him as I did," sobbed the young fellow. "I don't want to be a gentleman now, Dr. Everard; that is all knocked out of me. I see what ambition did for my poor father. I heard his last words; I saw him die. I only want to do some good in the world now. I am all alone. I buried my poor mother yesterday. She died at peace. She bid me, if ever it lay in my power, to serve you and yours, remember how much she injured you, and try to atone for it. It cost her something to tell me what she had done to you. But she thought I would make one more witness."

"You shall atone," Everard replied. "Look upon me as a friend. I, in my turn, will try to do for you what he would have done had he lived. Who knows," he added musingly, "how far we may be permitted to make up for each other's shortcomings. If the one great vicarious sacrifice is so potent, others ought surely to flow from it and share its potency."

He sent for Lilian, and from that moment Benjamin Lee was no longer alone in the world. She consulted with Henry upon the young man's capacities and acquirements, and finally a situa-

tion was found for him in an office in Belminster, Lee having a great desire to live in the city which had such solemn associations for him. He also became subsequently, to his great joy, one of the choir, and his beautiful voice was daily lifted in praise and prayer beneath the solemn arches which had thrilled to his father's penitential anguish. Marion and Everard Maitland in time became deeply attached to him, little dreaming of the tie that existed between them; they thought of him only as a friend and *protégé* of their uncle Henry.

The depositions of the dean, and those taken by the clergyman at Alma's request, having been forwarded to the proper quarters, and corroborated by young Lee's evidence and that of Everard himself, who was able, on his examination, to give a satisfactory account of the manner in which he spent the afternoon of Lee's death, it became evident to the authorities that a terrible miscarriage of justice had occurred. How to repair this miscarriage was a difficult question, and one which exercised the mind of the House of Commons, before which it was laid, in no small degree. The ticket-of-leave was annulled, and Everard was declared to be a free man. The property he forfeited on his conviction was restored to him with its interest. There was some question of offering him employment under Government, which was, however, not carried out.

As soon as Everard was formally set free from the bondage of his ticket-of-leave, Lilian and he were quietly married.

The drama is played out. The November afternoon closes in upon the same wide and varied landscape that Alma Lee saw so many years ago with innocent eyes and unawakened heart, all unconscious of the destiny whose black shadow was even then darkening her path; little dreaming of the temptation about to assail her, and the tragedy in which one sin was to involve so many lives.

The ancient grey tower, dreaming in the soft afternoon haze, gives a mellow voice to the passage of time with its solemn, sweet chimes; the slender grace of the Victorian daughter-tower emulates its hoary majesty, as it rises above the smoke-canopy of the little town on the river; the tiny bays are visible on the wood-clad horizon; the flocks spread on stubble and down; the cornel is purple in the ivied hedgerow; the solemn, half-conscious silence of the chill grey afternoon seems laden with an unspoken mystery it would fain reveal.

"—— the silence grows
To that degree, you half believe
It must get rid of what it knows,
Its bosom does so heave."

The fairy music swells as of old upon the listening air; the merry bell-peals blend and clash in a sweet dissonance, changing into harmony, like the transient wrangling of happy lovers; the heavy rumble and creak of the broad wheels and stamp of the iron hoofs make a rough bass burden to the silver treble of the bells; and the nodding crests of the gaily caparisoned waggon-horses rise into view on the crest of the hill by the gate over which Alma Lee gazed in her unawakened youth, and thought of harmless commonplace things in which nothing tragic had any part.

The sturdy steeds stop, as on that far-off day, with a gradual dropping of the blithe bell-music; the great waggon is brought to with a rumble and clatter, and cries of "Whup" and "Whoa;" the drag is cast under the massive hind-wheel; and Will Grove rests, as of old, against the strong shaft, and gazes over the gate at the still dreamy landscape, and recalls the day when Alma's beautiful young face and graceful form were outlined against such a chill grey sky as this.

Will is stouter than on that day, and his limbs move more stiffly and heavily, and there are grey hairs in his thick beard. He wears no flower now in his felt hat, which has lost its rakish cock. He apostrophizes a sweet, flower-like face, which peeps roguishly over the waggon ledge at him, with a rough but kindly, "Bide still, ye bad maide;" and the bad maid prattles on with cries of "Granfer," and snatches at his hat; but he seems not to heed her, as he thinks of Alma and her tragic story, which will be related for years to come in the snug bar of the Sun, and by many a cottage fireside round.

"She were a bad 'un, she were!" he muses; and some vague notions of witchcraft and half-formed shadowy ideas of love-philtres steal down through many generations to his uncultured brain, to account for Cyril Maitland's strange infatuation.

And Alma hides her broken heart in her lonely far-off grave, just when she should be living in an honoured prime; and Cyril's crushed spirit has rest in his grave, within sound of the same cathedral chimes. And how many gracious gifts and joyous possibilities and noble opportunities are buried with these two tardily penitent sinners! Some vague feeling of the pity of it all stirs Will Grove's heavily moving emotions, as he cracks his whip and strides onwards, waking the fairy music of the bells in its blithe and changing cadences.

There are the Swaynestone woods; but the house presents a blank face, with its shuttered windows and closed doors, and no smoke rises from the chimneys, and no sound is heard about its courts. The Swaynestones are gone abroad for a year or two, to

live down the memory of the dean's disgrace. And here is Malbourne; but the old faces are seen no more in the Rectory. A stranger preaches from the village pulpit, and strangers walk in the pleasant garden, and know nothing of the sweet and tender, if sad, associations which hallow every tree and flower. Will Grove and his team go on their musical way, till the clashing cadences fade and die in the distance, and the last gleam of brass-mounted trappings is swallowed in the evening shadows.

Let us flit on the airy wing of Fancy southwards, over the dim downs and the grey murmuring sea; over the orchards and farms of Normandy; across the broad poplar-lined plains of France, breathing warmer, clearer air with every breath; over the airy summits of the Vosges; over sunny Côte d'Or, where the vineyards have just yielded up their latest spoil, and lie brown and bare in their winter sleep; over the green and pine-clad slopes of the Jura, warm now in the sun's western glow; over blue lake and icy Alp, till we rest on the northern shore of sweet Lake Leman, and see the solid stone towers of Chillon reflected in the clear, jewel-like waters.

CHAPTER XII.

AFTERGLOW.

Not far from Lake Leman's shore at Montreux, a pretty châlet, girdled round with the two-storied verandah so usual to Swiss houses, stands on a terrace among fruit-trees; and upon that terrace, in the warm, still air of the clear November sunset, stood Lilian, and gazed across the calm blue lake at the Savoyard Alps, which were already streaked and veined with snow, and admired the roseate glow which lighted the seven-peaked summit of the Dent du Midi as with celestial fire, thinking over the same tragic tale which was passing through the memory of the Malbourne waggoner to the accompaniment of his blithe bell-music.

The ethereal Alpine glow suggested beautiful far-off thoughts to Lilian—thoughts of paradise and the rest of the departed, of the pardon and sweet peace of the penitent. Cyril seemed near, very near, to his twin-sister at such quiet moments, nearer than he had ever been since the sin which put apart their lives, so mysteriously entwined by nature. The tragic scene in the cathedral had restored him to her as in his stainless youth; not that

she regarded the anguish which killed him as any expiation or felt his death to be anything but a mercy; he was restored because his falseness was gone and he was penitent; and she felt that their spirits now held mystic communion sweeter and purer than that of their guileless childhood, and rejoiced.

She was leaning upon a wheeled chair, as she gazed upon the exquisite scene before her, and breathed the soft breath of the parting day. In the chair sat her white-haired father, with a happy smile on his beautiful placid face.

"You must go in now, dear," she said, in the soothing tones we use towards little children; "the sun is gone." And she pushed the chair along the terrace to an open French window, and led the old man, who was very feeble, under the verandah into a bright *salon*, where a wood fire had just been kindled on the hearth; and, placing him comfortably in an arm-chair by the leaping blaze, left him with a tender caress to dream and doze in the gathering twilight.

She paused in the garden to pluck a sweet late rose and fasten it in the black dress she wore for Cyril, and then passed, with a light, swift step, through the gateway into the dusty high-road, and set her face towards the Jura, which lay dark against the incandescent sky of sunset.

She had not gone very far along the pleasant road towards the warm glory of the departing day, when her sweet, serene face, clearly illumined as it was by the afterglow, suddenly took a new radiance, and was, as it were, transfigured by such a look as no words can express; such a look as one or two of the greatest masters have succeded in painting in a Madonna face; such a look as only Christian art, and that its very best, can portray. The source of this beautiful expression was the dark figure of a man standing in a wearied attitude, gazing over the lake, in strong relief against the western brightness. He turned at the sound of Lilian's light step, and met her face with a corresponding radiance in his brown eyes, and came towards her with a momentary elasticity in his wearied limbs.

"I was afraid I had missed you," he said, suffering her to take some of the numerous parcels with which he was laden, and thus free one of his arms, in which she linked her hand with a loving pressure. "It took so long to do all the commissions. Vevey was full; the whole canton was shopping there. The children? Oh, they are rowing home. Obermann took a boatman, and the lake is like glass."

"And you are tired with the walk, Henry."

"I was till I saw you. I cannot get over this weakness yet,

Lilian. Of course, it must take time. But I am quite resigned to the fact that I can never be strong again."

"But you are stronger. Herr Obermann said this morning that you looked ten years younger," said Lilian, with a wistful appeal in her voice.

"Infinitely stronger, dearest; and there is every prospect of my living to a good old age yet, and a happy one. Shall I tell you what I was thinking when I heard your step? I was thinking, 'Suppose she had done as I wished, as every reasonable creature wished; suppose she had ceased to think of me, save as we think of the dead, and given her heart and youth to one who could have made her happy——'"

"But you know that was impossible, Henry, when I had given my heart and my life to you."

"Ah, Lilian, it is not every honest and loyal love that can survive such a discipline, and waste its youth and hope as you did yours on me! But suppose it had been so, and I had not succumbed to despair and died in prison, though I do not think I could have lived through those awful years without you."

"And yet you talk of my wasted youth."

"And it was wasted for you, darling. But suppose it had been so, and I had regained my freedom, and found you, as you must ever have been, a kind, true friend, but the happy wife of another —of Swaynestone, for instance, as he told me you should have been—with your heart occupied by a mother's love and cares;—ah! my dear, how could I have faced life alone?" Henry paused, for his heart was so full that he could not speak, and the tears were in his eyes, and also in Lilian's, which were raised to his, speaking the language which no words can render. "What you have been to me! what you have done for me through all those years of beautiful sacrifice!" he added, when his voice came back.

"Dearest, I have only loved you," replied Lilian.

"You have only loved me," echoed Henry, pressing her hand more closely to his heart; "that is all. Sometimes I think I should not have been happier if we had been united in our youth, and lived all those years of fuller life together. Darling, there are compensations: it was worth going to prison all those years to find you at the end." And he thought, but did not say, that Cyril's treachery was atoned by his twin-sister's loyalty.

Lilian always felt that she must make up to Henry all the sorrow caused by Cyril; while Henry, remembering what Cyril's sin had cost her, felt that he could never do enough to make up for it.

"Of one thing I am quite sure," he added, as they reached

the gate, and the evening sky, with its one white star, looked down upon their happy faces, "the young couple in the *pension* over the way have not half so sweet a honeymoon as ours."

Just then light footsteps came bounding up from the lake-side towards them, and Marion and the blind boy, Everard, their young faces flushed with pleasure and exercise, came running to them, followed by Herr Obermann, who now acted as the tutor to both boy and girl.

"I rowed the whole way, and Marry steered; and look! what a sack of pine-cones I have for grandfather!" cried Everard, gaily, as Lilian received him with a caress, for they encouraged his caressing ways in consideration of the blindness which debarred him from the pleasure of realizing his friends' presence except by touch. Then they all entered the *salon* together, and grouped about the blazing hearth for the idle evening hour they so delighted in, while Herr Obermann left them to enjoy his pipe and his volume of Kant in his own especial den.

Little Everard sat by his grandfather, and handed him pine-cones, which the latter threw on the fire, with childlike pleasure in the blaze and crackle they made, and in which the blind child also took a strange delight, saying that he could feel the brightness. These two were firm friends, never so happy as when one could help the other. Everard delighted to wheel his grandfather's chair, or lend him his arm; while Mr. Maitland would read aloud for the boy's benefit, indifferent to the book he read, since his memory had left him on the day of Cyril's death, and he could thus repeat the same book over and over again, with a fresh sense of pleasure each time, a power that was useful to the boy in enabling him to get passages, especially passages of poetry, by heart.

Mr. Maitland never realized Cyril's death; he remained under the impression that they were always on a journey to Belminster to visit the dean, and was perfectly patient, his lack of memory destroying all sense of the passage of time. Every evening, when Lilian visited him in his bed to bid him good-night, he asked if they were going on to Belminster to-morrow, and when Lilian replied, "Not to-morrow, dear father; perhaps the day after," went to sleep in perfect content, until one night, about three years after the dean's death, when, instead of putting his usual question, he said, very quietly, "I shall be with him before morning," and turned to his rest with a happy smile, and in the morning they found him in the same restful attitude, dead.

There was nothing distressing in the merciful infirmity which had spared his grey head such bitter sorrow. He was to the last

the same courtly, polished gentleman; the same genial companion, delighting in all that was beautiful and elevating, and content to look on at the life going on around him.

He could discourse of long past events, and of art and literature, as well as ever, but his mind never received any fresh impression after the tremendous blow that crushed it. On meeting strangers, he was sure to introduce the following phrase into the conversation:—"You may perhaps know my son, the Dean of Belminster. He has just been presented to the See of Warham." This was the only painful circumstance connected with his infirmity, save that he never could grasp the fact that Henry and Lilian were married, and occasionally embarrassed them considerably, by blandly asking them what date was fixed for the wedding, and always alluded to Lilian as Miss Maitland, a circumstance that led strangers to suppose that he referred to his granddaughter, Marion.

The children were carefully guarded from all knowledge of their father's transgressions. It was, of course, easy to keep the newspapers from Everard; and, with a little care, Marion was also shielded from them. The *Times* of the Monday following the dean's death published the telegram stating that he had died suddenly in the cathedral at the close of an eloquent sermon the day before, and also gave such a sketch of his life up to its close as is its usual custom on the death of eminent men, and this paper Marion read, greatly wondering that no account of dear papa's funeral ever appeared. Lilian took them away from Belminster as soon as Mr. Maitland could be moved, to a quiet seaside village, where they remained till her marriage. To guard them more effectually from any chance knowledge of the truth, as well as to restore Henry's shattered health, it was decided that the little family should live abroad for some years at least.

His physician had told Henry that he would never be fit for mental labour of any intensity or long duration, and he accepted the prospect of a life of busy idleness, which in the end proved very happy, however different to that he had anticipated in his youth. He was thus obliged for ever to renounce his beloved profession, though he never lost interest in it, or ceased to cultivate the manifold studies connected with it. In his quiet leisure he found opportunity to set before the public much valuable information on prison life, and particularly to indicate its hygienic aspects, mental as well as physical.

In the serene happiness of his later years, it was sweet to Henry to dwell on the brighter scenes of his life in the prison which had at last become so dear to him, and contained so many

friends, and he often talked of it, the more so as little Everard manifested an intense interest in everything connected with captivity. He had all "The Prisoner of Chillon" by heart, and loved to go into the vaulted dungeon in the castle, and touch the "pillars of Gothic mould," and the ring to which Bonnivard was chained, and listen to the lapping of the water on its massive walls, and hear people speak of the dim light with its watery reflections. Both children knew from their first meeting with their uncle of his unmerited punishment, and understood that his innocence had been proved beyond all doubt, but they never were told who was the real criminal.

Marion remembered the incident of giving the handkerchief to the man whose shaven head roused her little brother's innocent suspicions the day they waited in the pony-chaise outside the house of Leslie's widow, and it was her great delight, as well as her brother's, to get "dear Uncle Henry" in the mood to relate the moving incidents of his escape and brief spell of freedom, and they invariably wept with great enjoyment at the tragic close of the narrative, when the fugitive sank into the death-like unconsciousness of exhaustion and starvation.

Henry and Lilian became the types of true lovers in the eyes of the numerous young people growing up around them, and were always appealed to against the decisions of flinty-hearted parents and guardians in the crises of their love-affairs; they also became a second father and mother to the many Maitlands, Swaynestones, Everards, and others of the rising generation, all of whom regarded a visit to Uncle Henry and Aunt Lilian as the height of bliss. So that, although their long-deferred marriage was childless, it was blest with the love of many young creatures, besides the especial children, Marion and Everard and Benjamin Lee.

The little family was already knit together on that November evening in bonds of strong and deep affection. They made a pleasant picture in the warm firelight, the white-haired man, with the blind boy nestling to his side, feeding the bright hearth with resinous fir-apples; Henry and Lilian side by side opposite them; and Marion sitting on the rug in the full blaze, with her head resting against Lilian's knee, while she read her letters in the firelight.

"The new dean," she quoted from her girl-friend's letter, "is the antipodes of your dear papa, whom we shall never cease to lament. Mrs. Little's baby could not be got to sleep on any condition whatever, and naughty Canon Warne asked Mrs. L—— why she did not try one of the dean's sermons. He is dreadfully learned (the dean, not the baby), and a regular frump; his wife

and daughters (five) are all frumps, with red noses and hands and big feet. We called at the dear Deanery on Thursday, and oh! Marry, I thought my heart would break when I saw all the dear old pretty things; and when tea was brought in and placed on the very same table, Ethel and I burst out crying. Jim says it was the worst possible form, and mother was ready to sink through the carpet with shame. The dean is so absent that he stirs his tea with the sugar-tongs, and never remembers who people are, unless it is desirable to forget. Imagine the contrast to *our* dean. Your uncle George is driving the bishop to distraction with his goings on at St. Chad's. They say the poor bishop has gone down on his knees and asked him as a personal favour to travel for a year or so. The new tenor has the most glorious voice. Dr. Rydal says it makes him ten years younger. I think your uncle Henry knows him—a handsome fellow named Lee. The *Times* says that Lady Swaynestone has twins." ("Dear me, Uncle Henry," interrupted Marion, "how twins do run in our family!") "The last we heard of them, Lionel and Lilian were as naughty as they could live, so it is a good thing. So Mr. Leonard Maitland is to be married in the spring. Jim knows her people well. How we miss Everard's voice! etc." "And yet," said Marion, as she finished her letter, "I do not wish to go back to dear Belminster. It would be too sad."

And her brother echoed her words; and then, after their evening meal of Swiss fare, Everard's violin and his tutor's came out, and there was music and the singing of sweet old glees, while Mr. Maitland sat listening happily by the fire, and Henry heard from behind his paper or joined in, when required, until the hour came for the blind boy to stand before his grandfather and repeat the evening psalms, which he knew by heart from his chorister experience; and the young folk and their grandfather went to their rest and Herr Obermann to his pipe, and Henry and Lilian were left by the bright hearth together. That was the happiest time in all the happy day.

THE END.

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